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BEADLE'S

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# POCKET NOVELS



## The Prairie Scourge. 180









THE  
PRAIRIE SCOURGE;

OR,

THE JAGUAR PET.

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BY W. J. HAMILTON,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

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# THE PRAIRIE SCOURGE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE FUGITIVE STRANGER.

A MAN was riding alone over a prairie swell, accommodating his pace to the nature of the ground through which he passed, which was full of the conical burrows of the prairie-dog. A moment before the village of these strange animals had been full of life, but at the approach of their enemy, man, the little dogs had plunged into their houses, and were peeping out inquisitively at the horseman. He was one of those wandering men of the west, hunter, trapper and Indian-fighter. Ready to guide a party or convoy a government train; to hunt grizzlies, shoot Indians, or trap beaver. A man about the medium height, compactly built, with a lithe, sinewy frame, and a face browned by exposure to nearly the color of an Indian. His beard was of a rich dark color, save where it had been bleached about the mouth by smoke, water and tobacco-juice. His dress was that usually worn by the trapper—hunting-shirt and leggins of buck-skin, black belt, supporting a pair of revolvers and a heavy knife. A huge sombrero was on his head, with a black feather drooping carelessly from the band, and moccasins of Indian make. A fine rifle was slung at his back, and a keen little ax hung upon his high Mexican saddle-pommel. His horse was a black mustang of great beauty and power, capable of enduring great fatigue, and evidently a pet of his rider.

"Oh, take it easy, Garryowen," he said, addressing the horse. "We ain't got no call to hurry, I allow."

The horse seemed to understand him, for his pace slackened to a walk, and he worked his way cautiously through the village of the prairie-dogs, and struck the prairie on the other side. Here the rider pulled him in, standing up to



his knees in the prairie-grass, and looked long and intently over the vast plain.

"Seems as ef I scent Injins to-day, old hoss," he muttered. "Lor! send that they be 'Rapahoes when they come, for, by the livin' lightnin' I've got a small matter to settle with the skunks that stole my trap and pelts. If I ain't, my name is somethin' else beside Tim Badger. Hi! what's that? Injins, by the big snake."

Four figures had risen suddenly above a distant roll in the prairie, and were coming down at a rapid pace. The trapper instantly dismounted, and touching his horse, the trained animal lay down among the long grass as quickly as if he had been shot through the heart. The trapper took his rifle from his back and struck his hand sharply on the breech to prime it, pressed the cap down upon the nipple, and crept through the grass to a place where, unobserved, he could get a view of the approaching horsemen. They were nearly five miles off when he first saw them, but coming down at the utmost speed of their horses, and when he reached the place he had pitched upon, for making a stand if they assailed him, he saw them in plain sight, nearly a mile closer.

"I'm bound to git a shot," he muttered, hugging his rifle with a sort of fierce joy. "Oh, old woman, see that you shoot close to-day or your master 'll git rubbed out, sartin."

Those who understand the lonely life of the trapper will see that much solitude makes him talk with inanimate things for company. And in such a time as this, what is there he is more likely to address than those loved objects, his rifle and his horse? This man was no exception to the general rule, and he seemed to think the gun understood him, and patted it lovingly on the breech.

"Steady, you, don't go off of your own accord, old true blue. Jest wait till I give you the word. By mighty snakes, that ain't an Injin in front."

He was right. The foremost horseman was now in full view, and from his manner of riding, dress and accouterments it was plain that, so far from being a leader of the Indians who followed, he was pursued by them with deadly intent. From time to time he looked back over his shoulder,



riding with a loose rein, his knees gripping the saddle cleverly, his right hand holding the rifle ready for a shot if needful. The Indians behind were in all the gaudy finery of the western savage on the war-path, with scarlet blankets, and pennons fluttering from their spear-heads, and from the bridles of their mustangs. They were yet too far off to be readily distinguished, but from their general appearance Badger took them to be Arapahoes, a tribe against whom, at present, he was particularly angry, as they had relieved him of his traps during the last trapping season. There were five of them, all together, riding as only prairie Indians can ride, their bridles loose upon the horses' necks, their long spears grasped ready for a blow, and their crimson blankets streaming in the wind.

"Hooray," muttered Tim. "Only five of the mean skunks. That chap rides mighty well, that I do say. Come a little nigher, and ef I don't tumble that fust Injin I've forgot how it's done."

Scarcely a hundred yards now separated the hunted man from his enemies. They were gaining on him foot by foot, although he strained every nerve to escape. The horses were headed directly for the place where Badger lay concealed, and as they came on he threw forward the rifle, and waited.

As he did so he saw the leading Indian pass his lance into his left hand and take a lasso from his saddle-bow. He knew that, at twenty-five yards, this strange weapon was very effective in experienced hands and that the Indian would not have attempted to use it if he had not been certain of his skill. The hand of the Indian was in the air and the lasso had half completed the first circuit, when the rifle of the trapper spoke. The distance was five hundred yards, but he was the prince of marksmen. The moment the weapon was discharged he whirled over on his back and began to reload, without looking for the effect of the shot.

He had not counted too certainly upon the accuracy of his aim, or the power of his trusty weapon. The fatal bullet reached the Indian as he was in the act of discharging the lasso at the head of the hunted man. The uplifted arm fell, the lasso dropped harmless to the ground, and the Indian



swayed to and fro in his saddle, clutching with frantic violence at the blood-stained cloth upon his breast, where the deadly messenger had entered. A moment after, his horse was careering rapidly across the plain, riderless, and the form of the savage lay motionless upon the grass.

"Whoop!" growled Tim. "Rubbed out, that critter is, bet your life."

To reload the rifle was the work of a moment, and when he again peered out at the savages they were looking down upon the dead form of their companion, uttering short cries of vengeance, and pointing at the flying figure of the horseman. It was plain that they did not yet understand how their companion had fallen, so closely was Badger concealed from view. They did not lose much time over the dead man, and their enemy did not gain much by the halt.

"One more," said Badger, sighting the foremost pursuer. "Down you go."

Crack!

The Indian threw up his arms and fell forward upon his horse's neck, the blood dropping from his wounded breast. A shrill whistle now sounded on the air; the horse Garry owen was on his feet and bounded to the side of his master. Leaving his rifle on the grass, he drew his revolvers and leaped into the saddle, heading his horse toward the coming horseman.

"This *a*-way, stranger," he shouted. "Hyar's help *a*-com-in'. Yah hip, hi!"

The rider uttered a cheerful shout, and turning in his saddle leveled at the Indian nearest at hand. The bullet sped and the saddle was empty, but the bullet did not find a victim, although nothing of the Indian was visible, but his right foot clinging to the saddle, and Tim knew that he had not been hurt.

"Slippery devil!" shouted the stranger, whirling his horse. "Follow, friend."

The pursuers became the pursued, but they might as well have chased the wind. After a desperate ride of half an hour Badger called his companion to a halt.

"Don't waste powder, stranger. The fust you know they'll lead us into an ambush, and we'll git our ha'r lifted. I've



rubbed out two of the mean skunks, and I reckon we'd do better to ride back and git their ha'r."

"Scalp them?"

"Sartin, stranger. You see we ar' outside civilization hyar, and we fight the devil with fire. They always kalkilate to take our wools when they can git it, an' it would be mighty foolish in us to let *good* scalps go to waste, when they ar' as good as the gold."

The stranger nodded, and looked keenly at his rescuer, who was watching him quite as intently. He was a man rather taller than Tim, with one of the finest faces Badger had ever seen. It was not that it was wonderfully handsome, but the eyes were of that dark, liquid sort whose glance seems to pierce at once into the soul, and his hair was sprinkled with gray, though not with age, for he could not have been more than thirty years old. His complexion was very dark, and he wore a full beard and mustache. His dress was rather rich for the prairie, being of dark-green cloth of the finest and at the same time strongest material, which had never been cut by a frontier tailor. His arms were the rifle and revolvers. His horse was a pure white mustang, with red nostrils, inflated by the long run he had taken.

"Mout I ask, stranger, how you fell in with the red thieves?" said Tim.

"I was riding across the prairie, attending to my own business, having been separated from my party, and these rascals caught sight of me and gave chase. I owe my life to you, sir. May I ask your name?"

"I'm called Tim Badger by them that knows me well, stranger," said the trapper; "but don't you go to thank me fur rubbin' out them red thieves. Unlest I'm mightily mistaken, they are the same identicle bla'g'ards that stole my traps and spelter last winter, up hyar in the gulches. I consider it in the light of a Christian duty to rub 'em out, and I sh'u'd hate myself half to death if I didn't do it."

"Nevertheless, I should have been lassoed in two minutes more but for you."

"Prehaps you mout; I don't argify ag'in' that, but them Injins was bound to go under. Now see yer; thar's book-writers out thar in the States that blow a good deal about the



noble red-man, and how durned cruel we free-trappers and guides ar' They dunno what they ar' blowin' about. I'd like to git half a dozen of them critters out yer and set the Comanches or 'Rapahoes arter 'em, an' you bet your boots they wouldn't be so durned loving to Injins, ef they ever see home an' friends ag'in. Injins is Injins, an' they're a pizen, ornary, oudashus crew."

"I agree with you, my good sir," said the stranger, with a laugh, as they rode on. "But you don't ask me my name."

"I reckoned you'd give it to me if you felt like it."

"I am called Gabriel Sanborn. My business I would prefer not to mention just now, unless you press it."

"Not a bit. I've got enuff to do to tend to my *own* business, let alone any one else's."

"Thank you. There lie the bodies of the Indians, and you will excuse me if I halt here while you do your work."

"I've seen lots of men squeamish 'bout raisin' ha'r at fust, that was hot as fire arter it arter they got used to it, and was made wild by the pizen deviltries of the Injins," said Tim. "Waal, you stop hyar; I won't be half a minute."

He rode back directly, pushing something under the bosom of his hunting-shirt.

"Mout I ask whar you intend to go, Mr. Sanborn? 'Twon't be safe for you to be alone on the prairer now."

"I am in search of a man, whom I have heard from in this part of the territory, with whom I have some business. His name is Richard Ingoldsby."

The trapper gave utterance to a low whistle of surprise.

"Whew! Is he a friend of yours, stranger?"

"No; my worst enemy, but I must see him for all that."

The trapper drew a long breath.

"I'm mighty glad you kin say that of Dick Ingoldsby, Mr. Sanborn, for I don't bet very heavy on him. He's a sly card, and is up to some deviltry, though what it is I don' advertise to tell. What does he mean, living whar he does, in a moun-t'in gulch away from everybody?"

"Do you know the fellow, then?"

"Know him? Yas! I know him to speak to, but we don't hanker arter one another, somehow. He don't like me and I don't like him."



"Can you lead me to the place where I can see this man without being seen by him?"

"Easy enuff, stranger, if you like to take a long tramp, but it's a goodish stretch from hyar, you must know."

"Bah! I have traveled five thousand miles to find him, and I am not likely to turn back at the moment of success. May I ask if you are a guide?"

"I reckon I know the kentry as well as most of 'em," replied Tim, modestly.

"Are you employed at present?"

"No."

"Then, if you like, you may consider yourself as employed by me until further notice. And, in token that I am in earnest, take these."

He endeavored to slip some gold-pieces into Tim's hand, but the guide quietly but firmly refused to take them.

"Keep yer dust, stranger, keep yer dust. When I've done my work I'll take pay, and not afore. I'm your man as long as you want me, and I don't think you could better yourself."

"I'm certain of it. Lead the way, and at once."

"Take it easy, Mr. Sanborn. Dick Ingoldsby ain't going to run away. Ef he was he wouldn't have stayed so long on this trail. And, one thing more I want to say is—that the Injins may take a notion to foller our trail, an' git back these sculps, which I don't think I'd like. I'm to be boss of this business till we find Dick."

"Certainly; I do not know the country," replied the other.

They rode for half an hour at a slow trot over the prairie, headed to the south-east. Very little talking was done, for each was busy with his own thoughts. The trapper was thinking of the strange manner in which he had found employment, and the other had a stern look upon his handsome face, as if his thoughts were far from pleasant. From time to time he muttered the name of Richard Ingoldsby under his breath, and his hand wandered to the hilt of a weapon whenever he did so.

The face of the prairie changed as they proceeded: thick patches of woodland appeared, and the ground was more bro-



ken. About one o'clock they halted in the edge of one of these clumps of timber, and the guide produced some cold venison steaks from his "possible sack," and placed them upon a piece of bark. From the same receptacle he brought out some corn bread and crackers, which he placed beside the meat. Mr. Sanborn went to his saddlebags and brought out a wicker flask of Cognac, and Tim sampled it, winking at his employer in commendation of his taste in the selection of liquor. They ate heartily of the cold venison and bread, and having cleared the table by the summary process of throwing it away, Tim lighted a pipe, and bracing himself against a tree, was about to enjoy his midday siesta, when he was startled by a sound from the woods near at hand. To start to his feet, with his hand upon a rifle, was his first thought, but the sounds ceased, and Tim waited for a repetition.

"What is it, Tim?" whispered Sanborn, who had drawn a pistol.

"Keep shady," replied the trapper. "Danger; let me work it out."

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## CHAPTER II.

### A STRANGE PET.

THE words had scarcely passed his lips when there came a sound as of something crawling over the dry leaves, a stealthy, catlike tread, and the rifle of the guide was at his shoulder. A moment after, and a long, yellow body gleamed among the leaves, and they saw the terrible scourge of the American jungles, the jaguar. But, to the surprise of both, about his neck was a strong collar, from which dangled about two feet of steel chain, which, as the animal moved, caused the clinking sound which had at first startled them. Before the guide could fire, the animal uttered its peculiar cry and leaped into the bushes.

"A tame tiger," said Tim, drawing a long breath. "Lord love you, if it had be'n a wild one, thar would hev be'n wigs on the leaves now, I'll bet."



At this moment they heard a clear, sweet voice cry, "Here, Nero; come here, sir, this instant."

The rush of horse's feet followed, and springing to the edge of the thicket, Sanborn witnessed a sight the like of which he had never seen. The jaguar was running across the plain, and close behind him, armed only with a riding-whip, rode a young girl, calling sternly to the fierce brute, and threatening him with the whip. He appeared to be utterly cowed, and ran more from fear of the thrashing he had earned than any thing else. She was almost upon him, when he doubled suddenly, and ran back toward the cover. With an angry ejaculation, the girl reined in her horse and dashed after him. Just before reaching the wood, she bent in the saddle, and the heavy whip descended upon the yellow hide of the tiger, who at once fell to the earth in abject terror, while the girl sprung out of her saddle, and placing her foot upon the prostrate brute, belabored him vigorously, crying out against him between each stroke. The animal received the beating submissively, uttering low whines of terror, while Tim and Sanborn stood laughing, but nervous, fearing that the brute might turn upon her. But they were wrong. The fiercest of the brute creation, once cowed, dares not turn upon the hand which has conquered them, no matter how hard it may smite.

"Did ye ever see the like of that in all your born days, 'square?" said Tim. "A little whip of a gal—nothin' more or less."

"He may turn on her."

"Not he. You see she's got him cowed down so that he takes his licking like a man."

"Get up, sir," cried the girl, removing her foot from the cowering animal. "Jump!"

The animal sprung to his feet, regarding her in ludicrous terror.

"Do you intend to run away from me again, sir?" she cried.

The tiger shook his head from side to side.

"I am sorry to have to flog you, Nero, but you know that I promised to give it to you if you dared to move away from me without my permission."



"Hear her!" muttered Tim. "Ain't this high? and, lovely snakes, ain't she a stunner?"

Sanborn did not speak, but stood looking at the girl with dilated eyes. Such a vision of loveliness he had never gazed upon, wild and strange as his various adventures had been. She was young, not more than twenty, with a graceful, sylph like figure, and a face in which a painter would have gloried. Her complexion was rich, though dark, her hair a waving, lustrous mass, and her eyes wells of sparkling light and intelligence. The dress she wore was something like that of a *vivandiere*, a sort of kirtle of green cloth braided and slashed with gold cords, over an underskirt of crimson. She wore loose Turkish trowsers, confined at the ankles by golden bands and dainty moccasins, which Cleopatra might have worn.

Upon her curling hair, jauntily placed, was a Glengary bonnet, with a waving black cock-feather in a silver buckle.

About her waist she wore a red belt, sustaining a pair of silver-mounted revolvers, and a dagger in an embossed leather sheath. Swung by straps in front of the saddle was an elegant carbine, of exquisite make and finish. The horse was a pied mustang, not very large, but evidently capable of rare speed.

"I have seen a vision," said Sanborn. "I must speak to her, Tim."

As he spoke he stepped out of the cover, and showed himself, and in an instant she was in the saddle, with one of the revolvers in her hand, and the sharp click-click which sounded in his ears told that she had cocked it.

"Who are you?" she cried.

"A friend."

"Come no nearer, friend," she replied, raising the pistol. "We can be good friends enough with this distance between us."

"Look at me," he said, quietly. "Do I look like a man who would injure you?"

She bent her eyes upon him with a keen glance, took in his noble face and form, and quietly unlocked the pistol, and replaced it in her belt.

"I trust you," she said. "You may approach if you like."



He came forward quickly, and she dismounted and stood beside her horse, tapping her dress with her silver-mounted riding-whip, her eyes cast down, and a blush suffusing her cheek.

"You must make allowances for my surprise at seeing a woman like you alone upon the prairie, so far from the abodes of men. It is wonderful."

"I have friends nearer at hand than you imagine," she said, quietly, looking up at him. "Never fear for me. I am in no danger, for the Indians will not harm me, and I have no fear of other men."

"This strange beast in your company, did you tame him?"

"No; but he is mine. He was raised from a cub, and taught first to fear and then to love me."

"The last would not be difficult," muttered the adventurer. "Do you traverse these wide plains alone?"

"Yes, and I have done so for years. There are few places upon the Santa Fe trail, and for fifty miles to the north and south, upon which my mustang has not set his foot."

"Do you always travel alone?"

"No; I very often have company, but the norther is not more free than I."

"Strange girl. Do you not know that there are terrible dangers, more terrible to a woman than to a man, upon these vast plains?"

"I fear them not. I know how to protect myself. My hand is firm, and my weapons true, and I can protect my honor in the hour of danger. If you had dared to hint an insult to me, you would have been a dead man now. Do you see the white knot in yonder tree?"

She indicated a trunk, twenty paces distant, and, raising her revolver, apparently without aim, pulled the trigger. Tim sprang to the tree, and put his finger upon the spot where the ball had entered, in the very center of the knot.

"A good shot, gal," he shouted. "I couldn't beat it myself."

"Pshaw!" she said, pettishly. "You can not shoot with me. I can beat you with any weapon."

"Now, gal—now, gal," said Tim, "don't talk that ar' way. I am sure death when I look through the double sights."



"I can beat you," she persisted, stamping her little foot. "Choose your mark, any thing within the range of my carbine, and I will make a better shot than you."

"Kain't be did, little 'un. I don't 'low no gals to beat me with a rifle."

"You are a boaster," she cried impatiently. "You dare not give me a trial."

"Don't rile me, gal," said Tim, beginning to get angry. "I don't want to hurt your feelin's; but it's my belief you ain't a patch along 'er me shootin'. Stands to reason, when I've handled a shootin'-iron ever sence I could stand alone."

"I will prove you, boaster that you are," she cried. "Take your rifle and shoot at the mark I shall give you."

She took the dagger from her belt, and ran into the bushes, where she cut a long wand, not an inch in circumference, from which she peeled the bark to the hight of five feet, while the guide looked at her in surprise. When she had finished it to her satisfaction, she sprung into the saddle and rode out upon the prairie to the distance of a hundred yards, where she planted the rod upright, and rode quickly back, where they stood.

"What's that fur?" demanded Tim.

"To shoot at," she answered.

"You ain't in the habit o' shootin' at a sunbeam, ar' you, gal?" he said, derisively. "Thar ain't no critter on the plains can hit that bit of wood."

"That is nothing," she said. "If you are afraid to try it, I will shoot first."

"Oh, I'll shoot at it, but I don't think I kin hit it," replied Tim, as he brought his rifle to his shoulder, and took a long and careful aim. The rifle cracked, and the rod was seen to waver a little.

"By gracious, I did hit it," cried Tim, "and it's the best shot I ever made."

"You touched it," she said. "I will put a ball through the center."

"Ef you do, you beat a man that never 'lowed any one to lay over him with a rifle," he said. "But you kain't hit it."

She took the little carbine from the saddle, looked at the cap, struck her hand sharply on the breech, and took her po-



sition. The *posé* she assumed was beautiful, and Sanborn looked at her in undisguised admiration. The piece had barely touched her shoulder, when it was discharged, and the rod fell to the ground.

"Fetch it, Nero," she cried. The jaguar started off obediently, and came back a moment after, carrying the rod in his mouth. The bullet from the carbine had passed through the thickest part of the wood, cutting it nearly asunder, while the one from Tim's rifle had just touched the wood on the outside.

"Hyar," said Tim, "take my hat, little 'un. I ain't no great shakes, anyhow. A man born and bred to the rifle, beat by a gal; and what's worse, beat fair. I'll lay up the rifle, and go to the States, and hire out in a store."

"You are not the first one who has bragged of his skill, and been forced to own that I was the best shot," she said. "But there is this in your favor. You have sustained your boasting by your deeds, for you carry the best rifle of any man I ever met. None of them have ever been able to touch the rod, and you have done it."

"I thought I could shoot," grumbled the guide. "Thar; I won't take it to heart too much, but I tell you it cuts me."

"Never be ashamed to own that you are beaten," she said. "Sir," turning to Sanborn, "I did not get up this match in braggadocio, but to show you that I am able to protect myself. You are the first white man from the coast whom I have ever allowed to come near and speak to me when alone upon the prairie. Shall I tell you why?"

"I should be glad to know."

"Because your heart speaks in your face and it is a noble one. You would not do a woman a wrong in any way, and would protect such a woman at the peril of your life. You are a man who has seen much sorrow, but, through all, you have kept yourself free from sin. Such a life as yours sets its mark upon the face. I would be glad if you would tell me your name."

"Gabriel Sanborn."

"Sanborn! Oh, my God, not *that* name."

"It is an honorable one, the name given me by an honor-



able, though unfortunate, man. Why does it move you so?"

The rifle had dropped from her hands and she reeled blindly backward, covering her face. Sanborn sprung forward and caught her as she seemed about to fall, but she shook off his hands and repulsed him.

"No, no; do not dare to touch me. You know not who I am or you would touch a viper sooner."

"What do you mean?"

"Do not question me. I must go, and at once. This foolish bragging match has made me unhappy, as all foolish things must in the end."

"Will you not tell me your name?"

"*My* name," she cried, wildly. "Away; you know not what you ask. I had hoped by a life of self-sacrifice and separation from all I held dear, to atone for a great wrong. But, God metes out his vengeance in his own way, and it has come to us. Why have you come here? Why not give up this pursuit, which must one day end in bloodshed?"

"What do you know of my plans, girl?"

"I know more than you think, and I warn you. Turn back, while there is yet time. The path you tread will be full of dangers, which you can not avert or turn aside. Your life will not be worth a moment's purchase if your object is known."

"The danger will not turn me back," he said. "I have worked too long for that."

"You are mad—you are mad, sir. Whom do you seek here?"

"The man I will find, and his name is Richard Ingoldsby."

"You might as well send a messenger over the prairie announcing your object. If you seek him out, you will never leave the mountains alive. You, sir guide, are leading a brave man into danger."

"He will hev it," said Tim. "I ain't no right to fight ag'in' him."

"You can refuse to guide him."

"Then I will go alone," said Sanborn. "I am not to be driven back. Tell me your name and why you take this interest in me."



"I would not see a brave man perish. You are going among those to whom human life is nothing, when it stands in the way of their interest. You go to find a grave amid the wild passes, to lay down a life uselessly, which might do great good in the world. Turn back at once, and though I may never see your face again, I will pray for you to my dying day."

"It can not be. I have sworn an oath—it is registered on high, never to turn back until my object is accomplished."

"You will rush upon your own fate. Farewell, rash man, and in the time to come, remember me."

She sprung into the saddle, but he caught her hand and detained her.

"Wait," he cried. "I can not let you part from me in anger. Something tells me that our lives are linked together, and that we must meet again. Tell me a name by which I may think of you."

"Call me Aurelia, then; that is my name."

"Aurelia? I will remember it. Now, if you must go, God be with you, and guard you from the dangers of this wild land."

She struggled to repress the feelings which were heaving in her bosom. She panted for breath, and looked imploringly at him. Something in his face told her that he could not yield if he would, and, pressing his hand to her lips, she touched her horse and bounded away. She turned at the angle of the woods and waved them a farewell and disappeared, her strange favorite following at her horse's heels.



## CHAPTER III.

## THE COBRA AND AURELIA.

Two days later Tim and Gabriel Sanborn might have been seen passing through a narrow defile among the high foothills with the air of men who had taken their lives in their hands as an offering. Both had faced danger in many forms and were not likely to be turned aside by slight opposition. The face of Sanborn was clouded, but not by fear. He was thinking of the beautiful incognita, Aurelia, who had met them so strangely and left them so suddenly. Her great beauty, her innocence, and her brave self-reliance, had combined to make a deep impression upon the adventurer, who had gone through life so far without being touched by the arrow of the blind god, Cupid. While holding the most chivalrous sentiments regarding women, his one object in life had made it impossible for him to love, or to waste time in thoughts of domestic happiness or home ties. But, his hour had come at last, and he felt that for this woman he could dare any danger, and suffer any pain.

"Do you think that we are likely to find Richard Ingoldsby readily, Tim?" he asked.

"Who kin tell? I warn you that he is a strange man, and one I don't keer to meet any more than I can help."

"These mountains and plains are the refuge of bad men flying from the law. Doubtless you know many such."

"Ef you mean chaps that ought to be hung, thar's heaps of 'em," said Tim. "You see, we hain't got much law out hyar. What's the use of jedges an' courts, when thar's thieves enough to hang the honest men, any day in the week? I want you to understand that thar's a misselaneous b'ilin' of pure and undefiled raps callions who meander over the green plains and mighty hills. Thar's honest trappers, too, in course, but they ain't so thick. You see, whar a man has cut up so durned rough in the States that they begin to think of stretching him, up he gits and puts out fur the prab-



rie. Thar he's safe. No law kin tech him, no jedge hez any power over him. We git 'em from the East and West, Canada, Califerny, the States, an' Mexico; you bet!"

"How is Ingoldsby regarded in this section?"

"We dunno much about him, but what we know ain't overmuch to his credit. They whisper strange things about him in Santa Fe, and on the trail. Men hes gone out of both places through these hills, with dust a-plenty, an' ar' never hern of ag'in. Then thar's another thing. He knows too many of the roughs, an' when they stop at his cabin they are mighty sartin of something to eat and drink. We'd better leave the horses hyar, 'square. The rest of the way is rough and stony."

The horses were led into a thicket and tied, and taking their arms, the two men advanced on foot. The way led them through narrow ravines, under massive cliffs, by the side of mountain streams, and through narrow strips of bottom land. At last they reached a place containing perhaps twenty acres of rich land, surrounded upon all sides by the everlasting hills. On one side of the circular valley was a growth of low trees, and Tim stopped and pointed them out.

"The cabin is on the other side of them bushes. We kin git up close to it without bein' seen, I reckon."

He descended into what had once been the bed of a mountain torrent, which was now dry. It led close beside the eastern mountain's base to the woods in question, in which they buried themselves, without a word. Both understood the virtue of silence now, and Tim looked admiringly at his companion, who possessed all the attributes of the natural scout. His foot never settled upon the earth until he was satisfied that no stick was beneath it, which, by breaking would betray his presence. His hands parted the bushes so skillfully, that the breeze could not have moved them more easily or naturally. His senses were all on the alert, and he would have detected the slightest unnatural sound.

"It's *fun* to foller him," thought Tim. "He's the *boss*; go it, my boy."

Suddenly he paused, and one hand was thrown behild him to signal him to be silent. The trapper understood him, and remained silent as the grave, his hand upon a weapon, and



his figure as immovable as a rock. What had attracted the attention of the adventurer? Something white gleamed among the trees, some feet from the ground, and they could see that it was a hammock, suspended from the branches, and it was easy to perceive that it had a tenant. Who was it?"

At a quick signal from the hand of Sanborn, the trapper disappeared, as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up, and the next moment Sanborn crept forward, until he had almost reached the hammock. It swayed to and fro in the breeze, and he could make out the outlines of a human form. Just then the sleeper stirred uneasily, and a hand and wrist were thrown over the side of the hammock—a small white, delicate member, unquestionably that of a woman, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he repressed a cry of surprise. Grasping a low branch close at hand, he swung himself into a tree, not ten feet from the hammock, though not the one to which it was attached, and ensconced himself among the branches. The thick leaves screened him from view, and shut out the sight of the swinging couch. A green scout would have parted them at once to look out, and perhaps have awakened the sleeper. But Sanborn knew better. He began to pick away the leaves in front of him, one by one, and thrust them into his pocket. He might have dropped them to the earth, but he had followed a worse clue before now, than green leaves scattered on the ground. At last, as he picked out a broad green leaf, he found that he had struck the right place, and the head of the hammock was revealed almost under his hand, and in it, sleeping the sleep of innocence and purity, lay—Aurelia! His heart stood still as the vision of loveliness burst so suddenly upon him.

You who have looked upon the rest of a loved object, think what was in that brave man's breast as he saw her. The white lids were closed, the long lashes rested upon her cheeks, and a pearly drop glittered upon the pendent lashes. One hand and arm were beneath her head, and her clustering hair floated over the edges of the hammock. Her red lips were half unclosed, disclosing teeth rivaling the pearl in purity.

He sat entranced, gazing down at her, and for a moment forgot his mission—forgot that his object was vengeance, to



which he had dedicated his life. Such a woman had been his early dream, a woman good and pure, beautiful but brave, one who would love him through life, and close his eyes in death. What was she doing here? What was she to Richard Ingoldsby, the man he had traveled so many miles to see? Could she be any thing to such a man, to one as stained with sin as Ingoldsby? He had seen such things in his life—had known women as beautiful and good as he believed Aurelia to be, devoted to such stained wretches as Ingoldsby. The thought was madness. It could not, should not be! He would prevent it, if he killed Ingoldsby with his own hand.

The maiden stirred in her sleep, and murmured. He bent forward to listen. Imagine his delight to hear his own name uttered!

"No, no, Richard!" she said. "It shall not be. Sanborn, Sanborn! Mercy, Richard! Preserve him, Heaven."

"She is dreaming," thought Sanborn, "and dreaming of me. Sleep on, sweet innocent, and I could sit here forever and watch over you. Fear not, I was not born to die by the hand of Richard Ingoldsby. What is that? Surely it can not be that Tim is rash enough to come so near?"

He heard a slight rustling in the tree near the head of the sleeping girl, and laid his hand upon a pistol. The sound was repeated, and, as he gazed, he saw a sight which filled him with horror. A huge hooded head protruded from a branch over the head of the sleeping girl, a long, slimy neck followed, and he caught a gleam from a pair of basilisk eyes. Aurelia was in danger—a danger which he could not avert. He recognized the serpent at a glance, as one rarely seen so far north as Santa Fe, the terrible cobra of the south.

A sort of trance had fallen upon Aurelia. Her arms no longer moved; her very breathing seemed to have ceased. But should she move again, he feared that the terrible serpent would strike the fatal blow. The hood upon his head seemed to expand, and his diamond-like eyes glittered like stars in the light. He had coiled his huge body about the limb of a tree overhead, and only his head and neck swayed to and fro above the face of the unconscious girl.

The situation was terrible. He had the pistol in his hand but, could he trust himself to fire? The sinuous motion of



the head and neck made a shot even at that distance a hazardous thing, and a miss on his part might incense the reptile to strike his fangs into the upturned face of the sleeping girl. He felt all the agony of the situation, but, what could he do?

It was a time for action, not for dallying. His hand fell upon the handle of his bowie. Should he try to throw it? No; even the pistol would be surer than that. He cut a long shoot from the tree, perhaps eight feet long, and taking two or three buck-skin thongs from his pocket, he laid the handle of the bowie along the end of the whip and lashed it tightly. His hand did not tremble, notwithstanding the sickening fear in his heart, never raising his eyes from his work save to cast a quick glance at the reptile which still swayed its head back and forth over Aurelia's face. It seemed to take a strange delight in the proceeding, and indeed seemed in no hurry to strike, and when the knife was lashed to the pole the situation had not changed.

If Aurelia should move; if she should awake before he could give her aid! In that case, he knew that she was doomed, for the snake would surely strike. When all was ready he laid the armed end of the pole upon the branch and stretched himself at length beside it, and began to advance it inch by inch toward the cobra. He might spoil all by being too fast. Twice he stopped and let the knife rest as the eyes of the serpent seemed fixed upon it. The point reached the edge of the hammock, and he allowed it to rest upon it for a moment, with the edge uppermost. He knew that the snake must throw his head back for the blow and waited anxiously. He had seen enough of the singular tenacity of life in reptiles to fear danger, even from the severed head of the cobra. He advanced the knife a little more. Hand and wrist seemed turned to steel, and he gripped the pole with fierce determination. At this moment Aurelia made a slight movement, and the hooded head was thrown rapidly back disclosing the red mouth, forked tongue and long white fangs filled with deadly venom. The cry which sprung to the lips of Aurelia was frozen into silence, as the hooded head descended. It met the glittering blade of the bowie, and was severed at the neck instantly, the terrible head alighting on the sod ten feet away, while the bleeding body uncoiled and fell.



upon her breast, and then the woods rung with the terrible cry she uttered, and she fell back fainting. Gabriel drew back the pole which had done such noble service, and was about to spring down and run to her assistance, when he heard the sound of hasty steps as of a man running, and drew back, remaining silent as the grave.

"Aurelia!" cried a voice full of fear. "Where are you what has happened?"

As he spoke the bushes were thrust aside, and a man darted to the side of the hammock. As he saw her lying there, mute and ghastly, with the body of the serpent on her bosom, he uttered a scream like a maniac, and, seizing the serpent in his hands, trampled it under foot. And then, taking the inanimate girl in his arms he looked at her wildly, expecting to find the marks of the teeth upon her face. From his place in the tree Sanborn looked at him with eyes which had taken on a cold glitter, like that of blue steel.

He saw before him the man he had sought so long—Richard Ingoldsby.

He had the face of a human vulture. High cheek-bones, a nose hooked like the bird of prey I have named, with a dark saturnine complexion, thin lips and cold gray eyes. He might have been fifty years of age, certainly not more, and his Herculean build and sinewy limbs betokened the possession of great strength. Yet now, he bent over the girl with all the fondness of a young lover, kissed her cold lips, called her by pet names, and strove in every way to call her back to life.

"You aint goin' the right way to work, Ingoldsby," said a quiet voice. The man looked up with a start of surprise not unmixed with anger, and saw Tim Badger standing near, leaning on his rifle, who returned his look quietly.

"Try the cold water remedy," said he. "She ain't hurt bit, though it were a close shave, I allow. The hooded thief was just goin' to strike when his head went off."

"Did you save her?" cried Ingoldsby. "You have made me your friend for life."

"Don't say anything about it, boss. Any man would hev done the same for a hansum gal like her. Don't stop to ask questions, but git her where you can sprinkle her face with water."



Ingoldsby caught her up in his arms and ran out of the woods, while Tim stopped under the tree.

"Go with him," whispered Gabriel, bending down from his perch. "Don't say anything about me; but go to the cabin and keep your eyes open, so that you can tell what you see."

"Shall I say that I killed the friar?"\* said Tim.

"Of course; hurry, for he may come back."

Tim darted away, and upon emerging from the woods found himself in front of the cabin. The door stood open and he walked in uninvited. He found Ingoldsby bending over the body of Aurelia, bathing her face and hands with cold water and the color was gradually coming back to her face. As Tim came in, she gasped and opened her eyes.

"Tell me what it means?" said Ingoldsby. "I will not ask you how you came here, since you have done such good service."

"There ain't much to tell, Ingoldsby. The friar was in the tree over her hammock, and was going to strike her, and lost his scalp. That ought to be enough for you, and as for being here, you know that we free trappers have a way of going where we like, asking no leave of any one."

"I might question your right at another time, but not now. You have done good service and saved the only life for which I care a pin, and you have made a friend who will not soon forget you. Come this way."

He led the way into the next room and opened a box which was filled to the brim with gold coin. "Take a handful," he said. "It is not in payment for what you have done, but it may be of service to you."

"I don't like to do it, Ingoldsby. No, I can't do it, for it ain't fair. Keep your money, 'tain't no manner of use to me."

"You must take it," replied Ingoldsby, forcing a number of gold pieces upon him. "There, put them up, and remember, when you leave this place you are not to mention what you have seen to any one."

"What do you mean?"

"You must not tell that you have seen this girl, or know of her existence."

"And why not?"

\* A name by which the cobra is known in New Mexico.



"That is my business. Why you have come here at all I do not know; but, as it has turned out, I am glad to see you."

Just then the door opened and Aurelia entered hastily.

As she saw Tim, she turned ghastly pale and started back, looking at him with widely distended eyes. The guide was here; where he was, Gabriel Sanborn could not be far distant.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### HUGH ALLAN AND SANBORN.

INGOLDSBY looked from the guide to Aurelia with a sour, suspicious glance. Why did she tremble and turn pale at the sight of this man—she, who had been where bullets were flying thick as hail and had never blanched?

"What is the matter with you, Aurelia?" he said, coldly. "Explain this."

"I—I fear that my nerves have been sadly shaken by the encounter with the cobra," she replied, averting her face. "Do not mind me; I shall be better in a moment."

"Umph! Was it the cobra, or was it something else? You seemed to have quite recovered from the fright the snake gave you. Have you ever seen this hunter before?"

"Sartin she has!" ejaculated Tim, quickly. "She met me on the prairie, *alone*, not three days back, and we had a shoot-in'-match. She beat me, too, by gracious!"

"Did she? There are few upon the plains and mountains whom she can not beat. How often must I tell you, Aurelia, that you are not to speak to every wanderer whom you may chance to meet?"

"The lady will tell you that I was not the least bit uncivil to her," said the guide, in an eager tone. "Tim, the guide, may be a rough man, but he never was so mean as to insult a woman yit."

"I believe you, sir. Aurelia, you have to thank this man for saving your life from the cobra. Do it."

Aurelia took the rough hand of the guide and pressed her soft lips upon it.



"I will not thank you," she said. "Life is sweet even to one whose life is as purposeless as mine, and I may some day have it in my power to repay you."

"You shet up!" roared Tim. "Who wants any thanks? I ain't done any thing to brag of as I knows on; I'm paid enough for what I did."

"You don't think my life of any value," she said, reproachfully.

"'Tain't so; you *know* better, and you ain't got no call to say it, nyther," cried Tim. "I'm fully paid anyhow."

"As far as gold can repay for an act like that, I have paid him," said Ingoldsby. "Having done so, you must leave this place. I allow no man to intrude upon the narrow limits of this valley. It is mine—mine to do as I like with, and I will not be annoyed by visitors."

"As to that, Mr. Ingoldsby, these yer mount'ins ar' as free to me as to you. But, seein' you hev staked out a claim, I won't try to jump it."

Even while speaking, the keen eyes of the guide were busy, without seeming to be so. He took in at one sweeping glance all the furniture of the room. Every thing was of the plainest description, such as is usually found in a squatter's cabin, but there were a few articles which showed a cultivated taste. In one corner was a book-case, well filled with books, which had evidently been much used. Two or three rifles hung upon deer-antlers upon the wall, a jointed fishing-rod stood in the space between the case and the wall, and a small, heavily-ironed chest was in the opposite corner. In a curtained recess at one end a bed was just visible, and he caught a glimpse of various articles of female apparel, which showed him that this was the room usually occupied by Aurelia. They passed out into the next room which was still more rudely furnished than the other. A camp-bed was folded against the wall in one corner, and the only other furniture was a rough table and two or three rude chairs made by hand. A wolf-hound lay upon the floor, blinking lazily at the jaguar, which was chained to a strong staple in the wall opposite, and was walking up and down as far as the chain would reach, after the peculiar restless manner of animals of the feline genus.



"Keep considerable of a menagerie, stranger," said Tim. "That tiger is the durndest brute of his kind I ever see. Who taught him to fetch and carry things?"

"I did," replied Ingoldsby. "At a word from me or from Aurelia, he would tear any one into ribbons."

"I've got a sovereign preventative ag'in' all trouble of that kind," said Tim, tapping his rifle. "This little trifle don't often miss, I tell you."

"Come on," said Ingoldsby. "I will see you safe out of the valley."

"I don't need no guide. Don't trouble yourself, stranger."

"No trouble at all. Besides, I want to see that you *go*," replied Ingoldsby, coolly. "Aurelia, you will stay here."

Aurelia bade the guide good-by, and the two men left the house together, passing through the grove near the spot where the hammock still swung between the trees. Tim cast an uneasy glance about him, fearing that Gabriel would show himself, but that individual was nowhere to be seen. The voices of the two men had scarcely died away in the distance, when the girl came out of the cabin and walked quickly into the grove. She had scarcely gone a dozen steps when there was a rustling in the bushes, and a man sprung out to meet her with a loud laugh.

"Ha! little girl," he cried. "So I've caught you, have I?"

He was a young man, not more than twenty-three at most—a beautiful savage. The face was of the Spanish type, dark but handsome, with a clear, olive complexion, and wild, black eyes. His lips were thin, proud-looking, but sensual, and there was a willowy grace in every motion of his lithe, erect form.

"Why have you come back so soon, Hugh?" she said, quickly, as he arranged his disordered dress, which was of the gaudy sort worn by the beaux among the mountaineers. "You were told to go to Santa Fé."

"I go where I like, Aurelia," he said, sullenly. "You send me away when you like, and I will come when I like. Where is Ingoldsby?"

"He has just gone to show a trapper who came here the way out of the valley."



"A trapper! The devil! What was he doing here? Why didn't the old man shoot him?"

"Will nothing but blood satisfy you, Hugh Allan?" she said, in a mournful tone. "The man had just saved my life."

"How?"

She made a signal for him to follow, and led the way to the hammock, and pointed to the mangled body of the cobra, where it had been trampled down by the heavy boots of Ingoldsby. A little way off lay the severed head, with open mouth and the white fangs glistening.

"But for this hunter whom you would kill, Hugh, I should be dead from these poisonous fangs."

The young man turned pale, and his hands trembled. "I doubt I am a savage, Aurelia," he said, slowly, "but think how much we have at stake when such intruders as this make their way into the valley. I am glad he was not injured, but he must come here no more."

"I hope he will not," cried Aurelia. "I warned him not to come again, but if he had not been here, think what a horrible death must have been mine."

"I'm glad he came—very glad he came," said Hugh. "There, there, little girl, say no more about it. What is his name?"

"Tim Badger."

"He! Why, that is the most impudent thief in New Mexico. Painted Post and his fellows are after him now, for he killed two of their number on the prairie last Monday."

"Painted Post is a brutal savage, and it would have been a good thing for the world if a bullet had found his heart."

"You never liked the Indians," replied Hugh, "but we could do nothing unless they were our friends. Now look here: you must not show your dislike of them so plainly, or it may get us into trouble."

"Let Painted Post or any of his ruffianly band of murderers lay a finger upon me, and there will be one Indian the less to lie in wait for unsuspecting travelers," replied the girl, boldly. "I hate them—I hate their bloody business, and it makes my fate still more sad to think that they are counted our friends."



"Nonsense! You ought to be reasonable, Aurelia. You know, as well as I do, that we only make tools of them, and when our work is done, the sooner the buzzards make a meal on them the better we shall like it. Ha! what's this?"

He stooped and picked up something which lay shining in the sun at the foot of the tree in whose branches Gabriel Sanborn had been seated. It was a small golden locket, and the small chain which remained upon it was freshly broken. Hugh looked at it suspiciously, and touching the spring, it flew open and revealed two miniatures, those of a man and woman. Engraved upon the edge of the case were these letters: "*G. D. S. Murdered June 6th, 18—.*" This was over the face of the man. Upon the other side were the initials, "*A. W. S.,*" and the words, "*My mother. Died June 12th, 18—.*"

"Where did this come from, Aurelia?" cried Hugh. "By Lucifer, I believe you know."

"How should I know any thing about it, Hugh Allan?" she said, angrily. "You are always accusing me of something of which I know nothing. Let me see the locket."

She took the little golden case, and looked long and earnestly at the two pictures. The face of the man was noble, proud and handsome, and the woman's was angelic. It was one of those miniatures which are now so rare, that seem to live. Aurelia's eyes filled with tears as she looked at this grandly beautiful face.

"Did you see the inscription, Hugh? Poor lady! she only lived six days after her husband was murdered. Ah, he must have been a good, a noble man, and she could not live when he was gone."

"What do I care for the faces?" replied Allan. "What I wish to know is, where did the picture come from? Who has been here and dropped a piece of property as valuable as this? You see that it is set round with rubies and pearls intermingled, and never cost less than five hundred dollars."

"The owner did not value it for the jewels, you may be sure," said Aurelia. "Let us lay it down again, and he will come back and find it."

"Don't be a fool, Aurelia. Do you think I am such a ninny as to give back five hundred dollars' worth of jewels obtained so easily? Give it back to me."



"I will not," she replied. "You would destroy the locket for the sake of the jewels, and I will not allow it."

A fierce light came into the eyes of the young man.

"It is yours. Some one has given it to you! Where is he? who is he? Let me know, and I will tear him limb from limb."

"I repeat, that I do not know who the owner is. Perhaps the man who saved my life, as he is the only one who has been here."

"I know better. That ignorant trapper never owned such a locket as this, and some one has given it to you."

"Hugh Allan," cried Aurelia, drawing her slight form up proudly and dashing her open hand into his face, "this to me? You lie!"

It was not very ladylike, but she looked grand at that moment, as, with erected head, dilated nostrils and flashing eyes, she stood before him. He only answered by a fierce oath, and caught her by the wrist.

"Give it up to me, or I will not be answerable for what I shall do. Give it up this instant."

She wrenched her hand free and sprung back, and in an instant a pistol gleamed in her right hand, pointed full at the breast of her insulter.

"Coward!" she cried. "This is not the first time you have insulted me, and I will not endure it. Beg my pardon, instantly."

"What do you mean?" he gasped, recoiling from the leveled weapon. "Take care what you do; it may go off."

"It will, unless you beg my pardon for this insult. You know that it is false."

"I retract," he said, sullenly enough; "put up the pistol, and say no more about it. But there is some mystery at the bottom of all this which must be explained."

She replaced the pistol in her belt, and was turning away when he seized her again in his strong arms, with a vindictive force which drew a cry of pain from her lips. Then came a quick step, a quick-breathed "Hah!" accompanied by a mighty blow, and Hugh Allan was rolling in the dust, while over him stood Gabriel Sanborn, his fine face expressing his utter detestation of the man at his feet. Allan struggled up,



blinded and confused, and sprung like a cat at the throat of the man who had struck him down. Another blow came, straight from the arm-pit, and again Allan was in the dust, the blood running in a little rill from a cut on his forehead. This time he did not rise, but rolling over, slowly drew a pistol from his breast and fired. So sudden was the action, that nothing which Sanborn could have done would have saved him. But Aurelia was on the alert. She pushed the pistol aside at the right moment, and the shot sung harmlessly by the head of the adventurer. The next moment his knee was on the breast of Allan, and his fingers on his throat and a bowie gleamed in the air.

"Wolf's whelp!" he hissed. "You deserve to die."

"Kill me, then," was the fierce reply. "Better die now, since you have disgraced me in her eyes."

"No, no," cried Aurelia. "Do not kill him for my sake—for your own."

Sanborn rose quickly, with a pistol in his hand. "Rise," he said; "the lady has saved you, but if you dare to put your hand upon a weapon, you are dead. Give *me* the locket; it is mine."

Without removing his eyes from the young desperado, or his finger from the lock of his pistol, he received the locket from the hand of Aurelia, and thrust it into his pocket. This done, he ordered Allan to leave the wood, and he did so with a hasty step, casting a malicious glance behind him.

"I must go with him," cried Aurelia. "He will do some villainy if left to himself. But before you go, tell me who saved me from the serpent?"

His eyes sunk before hers, and she saw in his flushed face that Tim had deceived her, and that to Gabriel Sanborn she owed her safety from an awful death. The impulsive girl caught his hand in hers, pressed her lips upon it, and was gone.

"The first love of a strong man," murmured Sanborn. "Bright, beautiful woman, you must and shall be mine. And now to save myself, for I am in danger."

He turned and darted away at full speed, but scarcely had he gone a dozen steps when he heard an ominous sound behind him. It was the sharp cry of the wolf-hound upon his track.



## CHAPTER V.

## A DUEL OF BRUTES.

To the hunted fugitive, no sound is so terrible as the cry of the hound upon the trail. No man could honestly accuse Gabriel Sanborn of cowardice, and yet he was thrilled by a sensation nearly akin to fear, as that sound came with fearful distinctness to his ears.

He had not seen the animal, and if he had, his dread of him would not have been lessened. A gaunt, hungry, ferocious brute, with the strength of a lion, and the peculiar ferocity of his race.

Hugh Allan had the hate of a demon in his heart when he loosened such an enemy upon the track of Sanborn.

He ran desperately down the gully, looking for some tree at which he could make a stand, for he had no thought of escaping from the ravenous animal. He found it at last, a stunted beech, and was about to swing himself into the branches, when he became aware that they were already occupied by a guest with whom he had no wish to measure strength—a creature which is known only among the mountain men, and the stories of whose strength and ferocity he had often heard, the mountain cat of the west, known among the trappers as the carcajou. His hand released its grasp upon the branch which he had seized, and he fell back in dismay, looking up at the animal crouched in the branches. There is no wild beast with which the carcajou can be compared better than the American panther, to which it is nearly akin. But the carcajou is stronger and fiercer than its prototype of the Eastern States, and more feared by the hunters.

As Gabriel laid his hand upon a weapon, there came a shrill snarl, and the animal leaped, alighting upon the sod fifteen feet from the base of the tree. At the same moment the Russian hound sprung from the bushes with his nose to the ground, and made straight for the tree.

His sudden appearance was the salvation of Sanborn, for



the carcajou was already wheeling to attack him, when he caught sight of the dog. The long hairs upon his back became at once erected, and his fierce cry went up as he made a single catlike, backward leap, and alighted upon the sod just beneath the tree, his tail waving gently, and his eyes seeming to emit sparks of fire.

Not liking this close acquaintance, Gabriel swung himself into the tree, and, drawing his revolver, prepared to use it if necessary, although he did not propose to invite an attack by wounding his savage enemy, who, for the present, was occupied with the dog, which was coming on in long bounds, his red tongue extended, and his white fangs glistening.

When scarcely ten feet separated them, the body of the carcajou rose in the air, and alighted upon the back of the hound, burying his claws deep in the flesh. The dog shook him off with a mighty effort, and rushed at him with distended jaws, eager for battle. The scene was a terrible one to the looker on, whose only interest was in the fact that the death of both fierce brutes would be for his good. He might have repeated Iago's summary of the quarrel between Cassio and Roderigo:

"Now if he kill Cassio, or Cassio him,  
Or each do kill the other—  
Every way makes my gain."

He knew that he must do battle with the victor, and it was hard to decide which would make the most terrible enemy, the dog or the carcajou. He took advantage of the fray to load his rifle, which he had carried up to this time, thinking better of it as a defense than the revolver, which would make but little impression upon the tough hide of the carcajou, except at close quarters.

They were closely locked together, the jaws of the bloodhound fastened in the neck of the carcajou, while the long claws which armed the hind feet of the mountain cat were making terrible work. The blood dyed the sod for many yards around. Bits of hair, skin and flesh strewed the earth, and neither could sustain the terrible combat long. Gabriel was about to leap down from the tree and seek safety in flight, when he saw something which caused him quickly to



ascend to the thickest part of the tree, and sit quiet, hugging the trunk, and making himself as small as possible. Twenty or thirty Indians, the sun glistening upon their lance-points, were filing out of the pass from the narrow entrance into the dale. He had no difficulty in recognizing, in the leader, the same brawny savage who had given him so close a chase upon the day when he first met Tim upon the prairie. His only hope was that they might pass by the tree without looking up, and that the thick leaves might hide him from view. He seemed turned to stone; hardly an eyelash moved, for he felt too keenly the peril of his situation.

The Indians would doubtless be eager to revenge the deaths of their friends in their struggle upon the prairie, and he could hope for no mercy at their hands. Better trust himself to Hugh Allan, who would at least give him a speedy death.

The sounds of the combat luckily drew the attention of the savages away from the tree, and they rode rapidly up, in order to see more closely, and to give aid to the dog if aid was possible. So fierce was the struggle, that neither of the animals loosened his hold, although the bound was getting the worst of it. But, with the peculiar tenacity of his race, he still fastened with vice-like firmness upon the neck of the carcajou, which struggled in vain to free himself. The Indians would have given him help if they could, but there is no animal, save perhaps the grizzly, whom they fear so much as the "Indian Devil." They think the beast is gifted with supernatural powers, and that it is not in their power to destroy his life, except by charms. The man among the natives who has been so fortunate as to kill a carcajou is made for life. He is regarded among his associates as invulnerable, and can only die a natural death. Henceforth he may urge war with the fiercest of men and brutes with impunity, and must die in the lodge, honored by his tribe.

The combat must end soon. The animals reared for the last time, still locked together, and fell with a crash to the earth. Just then Hugh Allan ran toward the group, holding a rifle in his hand and closely followed by Aurelia, who held her pet jaguar by his chain, restraining him by the sound of her voice.



"Loose the jaguar!" hissed Allan. "The carcajou will kill the dog."

"Your dog deserves to die," cried Aurelia. "You had no right to loose him upon the track of a white man."

"Save the dog, Aurelia," pleaded the other. "He has been my friend and companion for years."

Aurelia slipped the hook from the collar of the jaguar, and pointed at the struggling animals. The tiger had been trained with the dog, and in that peculiar way they had acquired a love for one another, which is sometimes the case even among animals naturally enemies. The tiger seemed to know that his companion was in danger, and cleared the intervening distance in three mighty bounds, and alighting upon the back of the carcajou, fastened his strong teeth in the spine. Every bone seemed to give way at once, and with a single convulsive spring, the carcajou fell dead, while the Indians reined back their horses in some alarm, having no wish to become better acquainted with the jaguar. Allan ran in, and placing his revolver to the head of the carcajou fired six shots in rapid succession, every one crashing, through the brain. Aurelia whistled, and her pet left the dead carcajou and sprung back to her side, permitting her to again attach the chain to his collar. Allan lifted the bleeding body of the hound and dragged it beneath the tree, where he laid it in the shade, and looked at its hurts. They were terrible ones indeed, and a glance sufficed to show him that it was impossible to save its life, and he rose with a sigh of sorrow and beckoned to the Indian leader.

"Here, Painted Post," he said. The Indian rode up and looked down at the dying dog.

"Do you think he can be saved?" asked Allan.

The Indian shook his head slowly, and a look of unfeigned sorrow passed over the face of the young mountaineer.

"What must be, must be, they taught me in Turkey," he said. "Finish him, Painted Post. Put him out of pain."

The Indian raised his spear and Allan turned away his head as did also Aurelia. When they looked back the struggles of the hound were over and the master looked sadly down upon the mangled form.

"There is a fatality in it," he said. "No man's dog but



mine would meet a carcajou. I have looked for one for two years, and now poor Terror has met one to his cost."

"You should not have loosed him then," said the girl.

"Yes, so you say. It is well for that scoundrel who escaped that my dog did meet the carcajou. Curse him, I will hold him answerable for this."

"What had he to do with it?"

"It is enough that the dog's life was lost in following him. I suppose he has got into the mountains by this time. Here, Painted Post, I have work for you to do."

The savage signified his readiness to listen. He was a strongly built fellow, possessed of a gigantic frame, and gifted with a wicked-looking eye. His scant garments showed his swelling muscles and powerful chest. He had lost one ear in some battle, and this, combined with the fact that he had suffered from the small-pox, made his face horrible to look upon. His leggins were fringed with long hair of various colors from the scalps he had taken, and upon his breast hung a necklace of grizzly's claws, a mark of rank among the Indians "more honorable than the Star and Garter," for the man who wore them must have slain the beast with his own hand.

"Look you, chief," said Allan. "I do not like it that you suffer these accursed trappers to find their way to this place. You have not kept good watch."

The Indian put his hand under his blanket and drew out three scalps upon a string which he waved for a moment before the face of the speaker and put back.

"When did you get those?" said Hugh, looking at them quietly.

"Last sun they grew upon the heads of white men. To-day these white men are dead and their scalps will hang upon a pole in my lodge."

"It is well. Did you get any thing from them?"

"No. These dogs of white men had nothing but their scalps to give, but we took them, because scalps look well in the smoke of an Arapaho lodge, and the hearts of our women will be made glad when they see them on a pole."

"Come away, Hugh," said Aurelia, suddenly. "I have something to tell you."

The listener in the tree was surprised to hear her address



him in an almost tender tone, and his heart felt a thrill of fear, lest she should love him. The face of Allan lighted up with joy as he turned toward her.

"In a moment, my dear," he said. "I have something to tell Painted Post."

"Very well, then. If you would rather talk with Painted Post than with me, do so, and I will return."

She turned as if to walk away, and actually moved some paces from the tree, leading the jaguar by his chain. Hugh was in doubt what to do and called to her to return, but she would not heed him.

"Ride up to the cabin, chief," he said. "I shall be with you directly, but first I have something to say to the Wild Huntress."

"It is good," said the Indian, gravely. "A young chief should listen when the flower he would pluck and put in his bosom sings in his ear. Let my brother make haste with his wooing, for the Arapahoes are busy."

He called to his band and rode away toward the woods, and the delighted listener saw the last spear hidden by the leaves, while Hugh followed Aurelia, who was now walking quickly toward the woods. Why had her manner changed so suddenly toward Allan? Because, as she faced the tree she had caught a glimpse of the steel barrel of a rifle, and was confident that a man was hidden there, and that it was Gabriel Sanborn. It was something wonderful that the keen-sighted and quick-eared Indians had remained so long beneath the tree without detecting the hidden man, and nothing could have saved him but their interest in the death of the "devil."

"If you would always speak as kindly as this to me, Aurelia," said Allan, "you would not have cause to complain of me."

"But you insulted me," she said. "You accused me of knowing the owner of the locket."

"Did you not know him, then? He did not show much surprise at seeing you."

She was silent, and her eyes dropped.

"You have seen him before, curse him! Where was it?" he hissed.

"I will not tell you, if you speak in that way," she replied,



and they passed out of sight together, and the moment they were out of sight the young man leaped out of the tree and began to run rapidly toward the gap. He did not feel safe until he had put the mountains between him and the Indians. Once in the gully, which had been the bed of a mountain stream, he ran on hurriedly until he reached the gap, when he quickened his pace as the ground became more level.

"I wonder where Tim can be," he muttered as he ran. "Surely, he would not leave the valley without me."

But Tim was nowhere to be seen, and he hurried on toward the place where he had left the horses. Turning an angle in the rocks, he came suddenly upon Richard Ingoldsby, who was advancing from the opposite direction. They met so quickly that they almost ran against each other, and by a simultaneous movement, their rifles came to the "present," with the thumb upon the lock.

"Ha!" cried Ingoldsby. "We are overrun with visitors to-day. Now, who may you be, and what do you want here?"

"Excuse me if I question your right to ask that," replied the young man. "I am my own master."

"No man is altogether his own master in these hills," replied Ingoldsby, looking at him suspiciously. "Why are you in such haste?"

"I am looking for a friend whom I have lost in some manner," replied Gabriel, breathing more freely, as he saw that Ingoldsby merely regarded him as he would any intruder.

"What is your friend's name?"

"Tim Badger."

"You will find him in the pass, a few rods ahead. Let me advise you to find him, and when found make all the haste you can out of this section. Good-day."

He threw his rifle into the hollow of his arm, and strode onward, and Gabriel stood looking after him. Twice he cocked and uncocked his rifle, but he did not raise it, and Ingoldsby passed out of sight.

"Go your way for this time, villain," he muttered. "Your time has not yet come."



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE STRUGGLE WITH THE ARAPAHOES.

INGOLDSBY walked rapidly onward until he reached the valley, pausing for a time beside the mangled forms of the dog and carcajou, and wondering how they came to their death. He did not dally long in useless guesswork, but hurried at once to the cabin, where he found the Indians camped, and the chief and Hugh in close consultation.

"Ha, Painted Post!" he cried. "This is indeed fortunate. There is business for you to do within the hour. A man has intruded here this day who must die at once. I will give you the rifle which you have so often admired if you bring me his scalp within two days."

"It is a pleasure for Painted Post to strike the enemies of the Black Eagle," he said. "Who is this man, that I may know him?"

"He is as tall as I am, straight as a pine, his black hair streaked with gray. He wears a green coat and has a rifle with an eagle engraved upon the stock. Do you think you would know him?"

"Ha! it is that dog of the pale-faces who was with the guide they call Tim, when he killed Tasotau upon the prairie. It is good; he shall die."

"Then waste no time about it, Painted Post. I met him half an hour ago in the gulch, heading eastward. You had better not take more than ten men with you, and those your swiftest riders. There are only two of them."

"Who is the other?"

"Tim Badger. But I wish you would do him no harm."

"Does my brother know a snake in the grass when he sees him?" said Painted Post. "Such a snake is the Gray Wolf. Let him die with the other, for he killed Tasotau, the pride of the Arapaho tribe."

"Oh, I will not stand in the way of your private revenge



but this Tim Badger did me a service to-day which nothing can repay, and I would not have a hand in his death. What is it, Hugh?"

"I have something to tell you about this man," replied the young man. "To-day I found under the hammock, where the snake was killed, a locket with two pictures. I will describe it as nearly as I can."

He gave a faithful account of the locket, and the manner in which it was lost. An ashy-gray pallor came into the face of Ingoldsby as he proceeded, and he grasped at the logs of the house for support.

"G. S., did you say? Oh, my God, has the phantom of that time come back to me? It is horrible—horrible! What did you say the date was?"

Hugh repeated it as nearly as he could.

"Murdered; was that the word?" gasped Ingoldsby.

"That was it."

"Where is my horse? Death and hell, I must have that locket, and the man who carries it must die. My horse, I say! Every moment we waste is an hour less of life to me. I saw the father again in the face of this man, and he will never give up the pursuit while I live."

He whistled loudly, and a black mustang came bounding up, with a lariat trailing behind. Hugh held him while Ingoldsby darted into the cabin, from which he emerged with a rifle in his hand.

"Where is the dog?" he cried.

"You forget that the dog is dead," replied Hugh. "He was killed by the carcajou."

"Curse the luck. By his aid, we should have run him down in half an hour. To horse, Arapahoes! I, the Black Eagle, will lead you to revenge upon the man who led Tasa-tou into the place he met his death. Hugh, stay here and watch Aurelia."

"Not I," cried Hugh. "I hate this man as much as you do, for I bear the mark of his hand upon my face."

"Come on, then; get your horse. Aurelia will be safe enough if she stays in the cabin. Call her out."

Hugh called to Aurelia, and darted away for his horse, which was grazing on the short grass on the other side of



the wood. The girl came out at the call, with a look of anger upon her proud face.

"You have a bad memory," she said. "Two hours ago a man saved my life. Now you seek his."

"I will take care that the guide is not harmed," he answered.

"The guide did not save me from the snake, but the man whose life you would take. Tim Badger deceived you, because he did not wish it known that the gentleman was with him."

"He saved your life? *That* man? Who told you so?"

"He told me himself," replied the girl. "Beware what you do, Richard Ingoldsby. If you would drive me from you forever, it can be quickly accomplished by such deeds as these."

"Into the cabin with you," he cried hoarsely, "and do not dare to stir until I give you leave. Have you dared to speak with this man who has come here solely to rob me and then take my life?"

"I believe you speak falsely. He is not the man to follow you for any such purpose."

"But it is true. Go into the cabin and say no more to me, if you would not have me do something which I would repent to my dying day."

She obeyed slowly, but with a defiant look in her dark eyes. He put himself at the head of the savages and rode off at a rapid trot, sitting easily and gracefully in the saddle and showing himself an accomplished horseman. The Indians followed him as one whom they were accustomed to obey. Even Painted Post rode behind him and appeared ready to obey him. He cast a quick look at the line of savage faces behind and nodded approvingly.

"He has put his head into the lion's jaws, Hugh," he said, as his young companion rode to his side. "After all, perhaps it is better that he has tracked me down, for I shall make an end of his accursed race in him."

"He must not live," said Hugh, fiercely, "and if I can not strike the blow which ends him, I can at least see him die. Oh, if we only had the dog now."

"It would be better," replied the other, "but, he can no



escape us. There is only one pass out of this which is known to any one but me, and we shall catch him before he gets out of the foothills. If not, there is the great prairie beyond, and we are sure to run him down."

"I hope so; I would not have him escape for untold wealth, because that fool of a girl has taken a fancy to him."

"Aurelia!"

"Yes."

"It is only your jealousy which speaks," he said, angrily. "It can not be. She has never seen him before."

"But she has."

"Where?"

"She would not tell me, and even went so far as to threaten my life with a pistol when I accused her of taking more interest than she ought in the scoundrel."

"This is one more villainy to atone for, if he has led her fickle mind away from you. I have said that she shall be your wife, Hugh, for in that lies my only hope. I can not return to claim this inheritance myself, but you may, in the right of your wife. Send a trailer to the front, Painted Post. This is the trail of the man we seek."

He pointed to the mark of a booted foot upon the soft prairie soil. Painted Post turned to one of his men and gave him an order in a low voice. Resigning his spear to one of his friends, and putting the lariat into the hands of another, the young brave sprung out of his saddle and ran to the front, fixing his eyes upon the footmark, which he studied attentively for some moments. When he had fixed it fully in his mind he started off at a sort of trot, with his eyes bent upon the grass. They followed, accommodating their pace to his, which was not by any means a slow one, and in this order they disappeared over a swell in the prairie.

Woe to Gabriel Sanborn and Tim Badger if they fall into such hands as these!

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Sanborn, after parting with Ingoldsby, hurried on toward the spot where he had left the horses. As he neared the spot he gave a signal whistle, and it was answered immediately, and Tim showed himself at the edge of the little grove, leading the horses.



"We've got to git up and git, 'square!" he said. "'Tain't no ways likely this yer place is safe, fur I jest sec'd a party of Injins I ain't got no affection fur. They was them cussed 'Rapahoes, by gracious."

"I have seen them and had a narrow escape from them. But, as I don't intend to give up the object for which I came on their account, our business is merely to get out of their way."

"'Twon't be so easy, if they begin to trail us," said Tim. "Painted Post is no sucker, I want you to know. He's an artful, 'ily, cold-blooded thief, and I'll risk forty dollars he'd give the best hoss he's got to raise *my* ha'r. Don't think I'm skeered, 'square, but it ain't safe to linger long in these re-soundin' hills while *he's* round."

"Can't we hide?" said Sanborn. "Get into some place out of reach of these blood-suckers and then come out when they are gone?"

"I'm agreeable, 'square. I'm willin' to 'arn my money by hard knocks, an' danger is no 'count to an old mount'in man like me. You needn't be afeard but I'll do my darndest to help you."

"I am not troubled about that, Tim," replied Sanborn. "You have managed capitally so far, and I have no doubt we shall be able to outwit our enemies."

"I'm afraid they'll turn the cussid dog loose," said Tim, as he mounted. "I heard him a little while ago, and I'll be durned but I thought he wur on your trail."

"He was, Tim, but he is dead. Get under way, and I'll tell you how it happened. Do you know a young man named Hugh Allan?"

Tim had pushed his horse a little in advance, to take his place as guide, but, as Gabriel Sanborn spoke, he wheeled and looked at him in undisguised alarm.

"Captain Hugh! Do you mean to tell me that *he* is here?"

Gabriel described him as well as he could.

"Don't say no more," cried the guide. "This is mighty rough on us, fur I'd rather have the devil himself on my trail than Captain Hugh."

"You know him, then?"



"Rayther; yes, I know the durned skunk."

"He is not a good man?"

"Um—I guess not. Good? He dunno what that means. Why, I've see'd him split a man into chips an' wedges with a bowie, and laugh while he was doin' it. I see'd him shoot a Chinaman through the head because he happened to fall ag'in' him. I'd rather sleep alongside of that tiger that fol-lers the little gal, than him. He's a tiger himself, that's what he is. Push on; we can't waste our time if Captain Hugh is around."

They rode on at the best speed of their horses through the narrow pass, and in his haste the guide forgot his caution, and was only warned of his mistake when an arrow passed through the neck of his horse, bringing him to his knees. Tim was pitched over his head and lay sprawling on the sod, but Gabriel was equal to the emergency. He knew that if he remained in the saddle his hope of life was little, so he leaped down at once, and just in time, for an arrow whistled over him which would have passed through his heart if he had remained on horseback. This time he saw from whence the arrow came, a clump of reeds to the right of the path, and he darted in quickly, receiving a shaft in the left shoulder, just cutting the flesh, and he came upon a tall Indian armed with knife and hatchet, who came at him with a yell of triumph, nothing doubting his ability to destroy a single white man. The only weapon which Gabriel used was his bowie, a ponderous weapon, with a blade nearly a foot long, curved like a Malay kreese. The Indian threw the hatchet, but missed, and closed, knife in hand. Tim Badger, who had been partially stunned by his fall, came back to consciousness at the Indian's yell, and the clash of steel which succeeded it, and springing to his feet, he too drew a knife and darted into the thicket. He was met by a second savage, who was crawling up to strike his knife into Sanborn's back as he struggled with the first Indian, and the two became locked in a close grapple. The guide was not yet fully recovered from his sudden fall, and he found it difficult to compete with his agile antagonist. Both savages were wiry athletes, naked to the breech-cloth, and with their bodies covered with some kind of grease, making it almost impossible to grapple with



any chance of success. One was a huge rascal, with a great scar across his face, and a necklace of bear's claws about his neck. Tim thought no more of his companion, but of his own safety. Each man grasped the knife hand of his antagonist, and it was simply a trial of muscles. As the fight proceeded, and Tim began to get over the effects of his fall, he realized how much he had lost by that fall. The Indian beginning first, and naturally nearly as strong as his opponent, saw his advantage, and forced the struggle, striving to free his knife hand from the iron grasp of his enemy.

Tim was too keen an Indian-fighter to give him that advantage. They rolled over and over upon the sod, still locked in that close grapple. As they rolled, the head of the guide came in contact with a stone, giving him a stunning blow, and the next moment the Indian tore his hand away and raised the gleaming knife.

It was apparent that the scout lay at the mercy of the red-skin. What could save him now?

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PARTING.

AURELIA did not remain a moment in the cabin after the Indians and their white leader had left the place, but came out armed at every point, and left the place on foot, taking a course across the mountain.

In doing this, she knew nothing of the whereabouts of those she wished to aid. An undefinable desire to be of service to Gabriel Sanborn, to be near him, actuated her in this movement.

She toiled up the side of the mountain, choosing paths which from below seemed hardly accessible to the mountain goat, but which this child of the forest ascended with the greatest ease.

She knew nothing of the sickening fashions of great cities. Her limbs and body were not cramped by these deformities.



A life of wandering, restless activity had made her the equal of most men in fleetness of foot and in the power of enduring fatigue.

She held a course which she knew must bring her to the path through which was the only entrance to the valley. By her side was the jaguar, looking up at her with fiery eyes, ready to do her bidding at a word. Through deep gulches, up the side of the mountain she went, until a grand panorama lay spread out before her.

Far as the eye could see was the rolling prairie, dotted here and there by clumps of trees. Apparently at her feet she could see the Indians moving swiftly through the pass, eager for blood.

She screened herself behind the rocks until they had passed out of sight, and then looked out again, and her heart thrilled at the sight of the glorious work of God. She was one to love Nature for Nature's beauty, and to adore the great Father of the Universe in his works. But, she had no time to dally, and hurried on until she reached the pass again, at least three miles from the point where she had started if she had followed the trail, but barely half a mile by the course she had taken. Looking down into the pass, she saw a strange sight. One Indian in the act of falling, pierced through the heart by the bowie of Gabriel Sanborn, and a second savage, with his knee upon the breast of Tim Badger and a knife raised in air, ready for a blow. To think and to act with her were the same, and lightning was not quicker than the flash of her carbine. The Indian paused with his hand uplifted, staggered to his feet, and, with a yell of disappointed malice, fell prostrate on the sod, the blood gushing from his bosom in a dark and muddy stream. Sanborn cast his eyes upward and caught sight of her figure erect upon the rock, looking eagerly downward to note the effect of her shot.

"There she is, Tim," he cried; "up, man, up! Do you not see who has saved you?"

Badger rose, half stupefied, rubbing his head slowly and looking down at the dead Indian.

"'Twas a good shot," he said; "no one unless they was sartin of their aim, would dare to do it. I thought I were rubbed out, sure."



"I would not have given a picayune for your life," said the other. "Why, man, I had my hands full with this fellow and could not have helped you. See; she beckons to us to ascend the rocks."

"Thar ain't no path."

Aurelia stooped and cried out to them to move a little to the right, part the vines and look for a path. It was their only course now, for the steed of Sanborn had rushed madly away from the spot where his rider had leaped out of the saddle, and the hills were their only refuge. They obeyed her, and parting the vines, they found a rugged path, by the aid of which they reached the spot where Aurelia stood, leaning upon her carbine, with a sad expression upon her face.

"I am glad I came in time," she said, softly. "And yet it pains me deeply to take a life. The man had murder in his heart, but he died in his sins."

"Spare no mercy for such a wretch as that," said Sanborn. "He hungered for our scalps and deserved his fate. Men waste too much sympathy upon these savages, whose only thought is debauchery and blood. We have to thank you for much, sweet girl."

"Hush; do not thank me. I hope I did my duty, but it makes me very sad. I have come to tell you that you are in great danger. Hugh Allan, Richard Ingoldsby, and the Indians, are on the march, and they swear to hunt you down and take your life. I do not know what you have done to incur the deadly hatred of Ingoldsby, but he seems to know who you are, and says your life alone can place him in safety."

"And he is right," said Sanborn. "Was any one left in the valley when you came away?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"We must go back, Tim," cried Sanborn, eagerly. "Such another opportunity may not occur in a lifetime, and I must and will search that iron bound chest."

"No!" cried Aurelia. "I will not allow it. Wicked as Richard Ingoldsby is, he has been very kind to me and I will not suffer you or any man to do him a wrong."

"I only seek my own, lady," replied Sanborn. "If you only knew how deep the cause I have to hate this Ingoldsby



you would not think so hardly of me. You refuse to allow me to search his cabin?"

"Yes; it shall not be done, and you can not be so mad as to attempt such voluntary suicide. Do I not tell you that the whole savage band is close upon you, and that— Out of sight, for your lives!"

They sheltered themselves behind the rocks and not a moment too soon, for the Indian guide at that moment appeared at the opening of the ravine in full view, followed by the two white men and the Arapahoes. He saw the dead steed of Badger lying upon the earth, and hurried on, and a Babel of voices came up from below as they gathered about. Some of them pointed down the pass, but no one seemed to think of the possibility of an ascent of the mountains which towered upon either hand. At this moment some of the band raised a shout, and they dismounted hastily and ran into the bushes together. Immediately after arose the tremulous cry with which the Indian receives the knowledge of the death of a comrade, and they emerged from the bushes, carrying the two spies. They were quite dead, for their limbs hung loosely in the hands of their companions, and they laid them down with revengeful cries.

"We orter git out of this," whispered Tim. "Them pizen skunks will nose us out if we stay here."

"No, no," replied Aurelia. "They know nothing of this path and your feet have left no trail upon the bare rocks. They think you have gone away upon the other horse, for they are already mounting. And see; your idea of returning to the valley must end now, for they are going to carry the bodies there."

"Your absence will be discovered," said Sanborn in the same tone.

"How are they to know where I have gone? I tell you that I am free—free as air. No man shall dictate to me when I am to come and when to go."

"They are off," said Tim, as four of the party rode back with the dead bodies slung upon lariats between them, and the others tore off at a rapid pace down the pass. What's the next move, little 'un?"

"Will you submit yourselves to my guidance?" she said.



"Yes, willingly," said Sanborn. "For my part, I do not know which way to go and I doubt if Badger does."

"They've killed my boss, the pizen critters," said Tim, 'and goin' afoot don't suit an old guide somehow. Cuss the luck; couldn't they kill nobody's boss but mine?"

"You are not the only one who is unfortunate in that respect. Fortunately we have retained our ammunition and shall be able to do very well. Lead on, Aurelia."

The girl took the advance and they began a toilsome march over the rocks, hardly exchanging a word. Both the men were full of admiration of their heroic young guide, but they kept silent. She seemed to know the mountains by heart, and after a march of nearly a mile, the course became more open, and they saw before them a plain, which Tim recognized at a glance and drew a long breath.

"Thar; I know whar I be now, 'square. You can't fool me any more, but I cave. You hear me, I cave! I didn't think that any man, let alone a woman, could do what I couldn't in the Indian kentry, but I give it up."

"Your course is plain before you now," she said. "We must part, and forever. I pray that I may ever be held in kind remembrance by you both, but we must not meet again."

"Part?" cried Sanborn. "Where would you go?"

"Back to the man who, whatever his crimes, has been a father to me for many years. I know his faults—I know that he has a wicked heart—but he loves me. That word covers a multitude of failings in my eyes."

"You surely can not think of that, Aurelia!" said Sanborn. "Do you know any thing of the great world which lies beyond these vast plains?"

"Not much. What I am, he has made me, with a patience which was wonderful and a love which is boundless as the sea. Did I not know that he really loves me, I would not remain with him an hour."

"You are fitted to adorn any society. You might be very happy in a sphere better adapted to woman."

"I have dreamed of such things," she said, sadly. "But, I fear they are not for me. I am naturally of a happy disposition, and I do my best to adapt myself to my surroundings, but I can not be wholly at ease here."



"Then go with me. No sister ever was surrounded by such tender care as I would give you. Your life would be so happy that you would forget these wild scenes, and live at peace."

"You speak of impossibilities. How can I go with you?"

"Lay aside prejudice and look the world in the face. I am not known in the West, and I will announce you as my sister, and you shall be in every way treated as such. Whatever of good may come to me, you shall share. Whatever of evil, you will help me to bear, and I, who am homeless and a stranger, will be made happy by your means."

"It can not be; you know it can not be, and you do wrong to speak of it as if it were possible."

"Go then as my wife. I offer you that asylum, not so much because I wish to give you a shelter, but because I love you and would have you with me to the end of life."

"You know not what you say or I should be angry with you. Enough of this folly. Here we part, for the niece of the outcast, Richard Ingoldsby, will not make the home of an honorable man unhappy by her presence."

"His niece?"

"Yes. You can see now that it can not be, and you can not marry a woman linked by the ties of kindred with a man you hate, and whose life you seek. I pray you to go away, and leave this desolate spot where we shall finish our lives."

"I can not—I will not part thus," he said. "If you reject me, it only makes me the more desperate in my determination to carry out my plans. Tim, leave us alone for a moment."

Tim, who had been leaning on his rifle, looked up with a start.

"See here, 'square, I like you, but by gracious you ain't goin' to worry the little gal. I won't stand it."

"You do not understand me, Tim. I think too highly of her to cause her a single pang. Is your experience of me such that you think I would do a woman a wrong?"

"No; but you've got a tongue that would charm a bird off a bush. The little 'un says she won't hear to you, and she's right. 'Twouldn't be the thing fur her to go with us."



"Will you trust yourself with me a moment, Aurelia?" he said.

"Certainly; I have the utmost faith in your honor."

"I know'd she'd say that," muttered Tim, as he shouldered his rifle. "And I know how it will end."

He marched away and leaned against a rock, some hundred paces down the slope, where he could not hear their voices.

For a moment neither spoke, and Sanborn's fine face was working with suppressed emotion.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Aurelia," he said. "The rough words of the guide have shown that it was unmanly in me to ask you to follow the fortunes of a man like me, and yet I can not give you up. Somehow, since I first met you I have felt that you are the woman in all the world for me. No other woman has ever had my heart, nor ever shall. While I was in the tree over your hammock, this morning, and saw you lying there asleep, I felt that for the first time I loved as man never loved before in all his time."

She made no answer, but her bosom heaved convulsively, and she uttered a gasping sigh, and he went on:

"When I saw that dreadful serpent hanging over you, my heart stood still, for I thought I had lost you. I saved you, thank God, and no other. I could not bear to have you think another had saved your life."

"I owe you much," she said. "Even the wretched cling to life, and even so do I. But, spare me; I am not able to endure all this."

"I give you pain, sweet angel. What a wretch I am, and yet I am only striving to give you some excuse for my adoration of you. Yes; I love you so dearly that I could give up my cherished plans, to labor only for your sake. I could give up my pursuit of the man who has wronged me beyond thought if I could have your love to sustain me. But I fear it is not to be."

"You love me," she cried, impulsively, giving him both hands with a royal gesture. "I believe in your love—I believe it is true—I believe that I could be happy with you all my life long. Do not think from this that I yield to you. There are sacrifices to be made by all true men and women,



and we must make ours. I have taken my religion from the Holy Book I read, and though I know nothing of sects or creeds, I know that it is true. My religion teaches me that vengeance belongs to God alone and not to man. For my sake, give up your pursuit of Richard Ingoldsby."

"Do not let us speak of him. Blood swims before my eyes when his name is spoken. I want you to speak to me in this last moment, only of the love I bear you. Do you think that you could find it in your heart to love me, a man old before my time?"

"Love you!" I love you now!" she cried, and laid her head upon his breast and received his kisses on cheek and brow. Tim did not look up, but by a sort of intuition knew what was going on and turned his back impatiently.

"That was a farewell," she said. "You will see me no more, at least for the present. Something may sever me from Ingoldsby, and should that time come, I will send to you."

"You promise me that?"

"Faithfully; you are the only one to whom I will go for aid. Where can I hear from you?"

"At Santa Fé. Send to Don Estevan Villeno's ranch, and if I am above-ground, you shall hear from me within a week. In the mean time, I will try to give up my pursuit of your uncle, but I fear that can not be. Kiss me once more, my darling, and then leave me."

He once more pressed her to his bosom, and imprinted burning kisses on her lips. The next moment she released herself, and told him to go, and send Tim to her. The guide came back with a slow step, and she bade him a cordial farewell, and told him to follow the fortunes of Gabriel and guard him from harm. Then, with a gesture of farewell to Gabriel, she was gone, and the two stood looking after her, almost with tears in their eyes.

"'Square," said Tim, "in the day you do that little gal a wrong, you hev made an inemy of Tim Badger, and you shall die."

"And I shall deserve it, Tim Badger," replied Gabriel, fervently. "Now for Santa Fé."



## CHAPTER VIII.

## IN SANTA FE.

SANBORN remained in Santa Fé for two months, attached in an official capacity to the Government. He worked ardently to drown his thoughts of Aurelia, but, in spite of all he could do she was ever in his mind, and he could not drive her out. He thought of her beauty, her grace, and her noble defense of him, a stranger and an enemy to those who were her friends, and he could not help loving her, more and more, day by day.

During these months, strange reports were continually coming in from the buffalo ranges and foothills. The Indians seemed to be more active than usual, and it was death for a small train or single trapper or hunter to be found upon the plains. The names of Painted Post and his band were in every mouth, coupled with deeds of the greatest atrocity. The Indian showed a skill in covering his tracks of which they had not believed him capable, and some of the trappers asserted that the band was under the guidance of some white man. Mercy was not thought of; the stake and fagot were the least that a captive could expect, and in some cases the outlaws and bandits showed a refinement of cruelty too terrible to be here set down.

One day Tim Badger came into Santa Fé, accompanied by four or five waifs like himself, and sought out Gabriel, who had become a power among these rude men, both for his bravery and his skill in the use of the weapons they used.

"This has got to be stopped, Cap.," said Tim. "The cusses have killed poor Bob Brattle."

"Who?"

"Painted Post and his blasted party. The last straw broke the camel's back, and we ar' g'ine to make up a party to hunt 'em down. The men ar' all right. I kin git a hundred, but we want a capt'in."

"Frazer will be glad to lead you."



"We don't want no *rig'lars*. The boys won't stand to be ordered about and drilled up and down by no West P'inter that ever drawed breath. They won't do it, and that's the eend of it. They want a man of grit, that has led men, and ain't afeard when the bullets fly thick."

"Frazer is such a man."

"The capt'in is all right in his way, but he ain't what we want. Them *rig'lars* think they kin do what they like with men, be they trappers or blue-coats, but it won't go down with the rangers. No, we've *choosed* a capt'in."

"Who is he?"

"The fust letters of his name begin with Gabe Sanborn. Some of 'em call him Capt'in Gabe."

"I!"

"You!" replied Tim, quietly.

"But you can not mean it! I am a comparatively new man here, and your companions will not obey me."

"Won't they? Let me see a man refuse to do it, and if I don't lick him clean out of his moccasins, my name ain't Tim Badger. Don't you be afeard. Every one of the boys is fur you."

"You can not tell how much I thank you for this, Tim, but I don't think I ought to accept."

"You shet up; you've got to accept, I tell you. The boys won't stand any nonsense, and if you don't go quietly, I ain't sure they won't tie you neck and heels, and carry you out on the plains. So look out for yourself."

"Sooner than have them proceed to extreme measures, Tim, I think I had better accept, and so you may tell them. But, where are we to rendezvous?"

"Hyar in Santa Fé. They'll all be in by Wednesday, armed and equipped in trapper fashion, ready for red-hot war on the hull b'ilin' of Injin nations, with Painted Post at the head."

"I must have guides."

"Guides? Ain't *we* guides enuff? Don't you trouble fur that. I've sent out five men on the scout, and they ar' to meet us near Lost Trapper Gulch, and give us news of the Injins. But, mind you, 'tain't all Injins we've got to kick ag'inst."

"What do you mean?"



"Tell your story, Billy," said Tim, turning to one of the men with him. "Let the capt'in hear your voice."

"I was out in the mount'ins north of Trapper Gulch, lookin' fur a white buck fur a colonel down the Big Red. Thar was three of us in company, an' we was pitched into by a party of ten 'Rapahoes. They cleaned us out, took our spelter, an' left my two chums dead, an' took me along with 'em fur a barbecue. I had my eyes and ears open, and I'll sw'ar on the book that two of the devils was white humans."

"Ha! are you sure of that?"

"Sure as eggs is eggs. When we got into the foot-hills I made a break and got away from 'em, and made my way hyar, and I'm bound to have a hand in lickin' the devils that killed my chums."

"White men engaged in the business of butchering men of their own blood? It is hardly to be believed."

"Thar's more white chiefs out yer than you think fur, Cap. So I kin tell the boys you will go with us?"

"Yes; I am glad of the chance."

"I know'd you'd be, 'specially when I tell ye that we'll likely have a crack at Ingoldsby among the rest."

"Ingoldsby? Ha! I understand. You think he knows something of these murders."

"You bet he does! Come along, boys; let's make tracks."

The newly elected captain walked down toward the plaza, in deep thought, and unintentionally jostled against a man walking in the opposite direction, who recoiled with an oath and thrust his hand into his bosom.

"Is it your habit to rush against people in that way?" demanded the fellow, insolently.

"Excuse me. I really did not see you and must ask your pardon."

There was something in the voice of the man which seemed familiar, and yet the face was that of a stranger. His beard was heavy, hanging to his breast, and his mustache was cut and curled in Mexican fashion. He scowled fiercely at the young man as he saw the look of keen scrutiny bent upon him, and his hand came half-way out of his bosom, showing that he held a revolver.

"Be careful of your weapons, my friend," said Sanborn.



"Do not attempt to draw that pistol or you may get into trouble. I have already apologized for running against you, and can do no more."

"I have shot down men for less," vociferated the stranger.

"Probably; but you will not shoot *me* down, for if you attempt to draw that weapon you are a dead man. Put your hand down."

The man obeyed sullenly, directing a scowling glance at the speaker.

"Pass on about your business and leave me to attend to mine. I repeat that I had no intention of insulting you, nor did I see you."

"I thought that I could make you take water," growled the man, as he dropped his hand, evidently glad to have a good excuse to do so. "But I ought to pull your nose."

"I think not. That part of the programme you would do well to omit."

There was something so cool and self-possessed in the manner of Sanborn that the bully saw he had a man of nerve to deal with, and with a muttered curse he passed on, and Sanborn called to one of his trapper friends.

"Do you know that fellow?" he said, pointing to the retreating figure of the quarrelsome stranger.

"No, Cap," replied the man. "I ought to know every man in Santa Fé, but he is a stranger. Never saw him before in my life."

"He seemed disposed to quarrel with me, and few men quarrel without a reason."

"Oh, as to that, our boys quarrel on very small provocation, Cap. 'Tain't nothin' to see 'em fight just for the fun of the thing, but they ain't malecious in it, and that chap looks ugly. If you ain't no objections I'll find out whar he goes."

"I think you had better. Come to me after you run the fox to earth. You know where to find me."

The two parted, and after sauntering idly up and down for a moment, keeping the man in view, the hunter turned and followed him at a leisurely pace down the street, stopping now and then to exchange a word with a friend or to bestow a platonic wink upon some dark-eyed Mexican woman as she passed, clad in her jaunty dress over which was thrown the



scarlet *rebosa*. The stranger looked about him cautiously and then turned into an alley and disappeared. The spy sauntered after him, and when he reached the entrance to the alley the object of his pursuit was not in sight.

"Gone into Lopez's ranch, eh," muttered the man. "Thar bein' no objections, I guess I'll foller."

He rapped at a door set in the wall of an adobe house facing the alley, and it was opened part way, and a rather pretty face peeped out.

"Good-morning, Inez," said the man. "*Caramba*; but you are looking blooming to-day."

Inez was proof against flattery.

"What do you want?"

"Want? I want to come in. I've a notion to try my luck at the picters to-day."

"Then you must be flush of money, since you dropped the last ounce at *monté* last night."

"Well, I've made a raise. Don't stop the door, girl. I have as good a right here as any one else."

"They are not playing now," cried the girl. "You had better wait a while."

"Bah! I saw a man go in just now, Inez. Come, you may as well open the door, for I intend to come in."

"To be sure, there was a gentleman from the Post who came in just now, but he came to see my father."

"And I want to see you. Let me in; do you think I am drunk? If that door is not opened soon I'll go through the wall."

"*Cospetto*, Inez," said a shrill voice. "What is all this noise about? Who is at the door?"

As this was said, a hasty step was heard, and a weazen-faced old Mexican appeared. In spite of his age he wore the gayest dress in vogue among the Mexicans, and jewels flashed upon every finger of his yellow hands. The spy pushed by Inez and made his way into the hall.

"How is this, you old rascal?" cried he. "Am I refused entrance to this house? I have paid my way, I think."

"Do not be angry, señor, for the love of the Virgin. This foolish girl does not know what she is doing."

"You had better think it over, for you know I can get men



enough to go through your ranch from top to bottom in five minutes, and I'll do it, if you give me any lip."

Inez whispered something in the ear of her father, at which his face changed.

"But you had better not go in now, señor. There is a private party having a little game, and they won't like to have intruders," said the old sinner.

"It won't do, Lopez. I'm going into this room, because I've taken a notion to do so. Get out of the way, or I'll chuck you through the window, in double-quick time."

Inez disappeared, and a hasty whispering was heard in the next room. Directly after, some sort of signal was heard, and the owner of the house turned to his self-invited guest with a bland smile.

"Far be it from me to refuse to admit you, since you insist upon it," he said. "Come in."

"I thought so," grumbled the American. "It's well you came down just when you did, for, as sure as you live, down your shanty would have gone in a minnit more."

They passed into the next room, where a number of men were engaged in various games of chance, some of whom greeted the spy with shouts of welcome.

He nodded gayly to his friends, called for wine, and beckoned one of his friends who was not playing, to come to his table, and they conversed for some time in a low tone, unheard by their companions. Soon after, Fawcett, for that was the name of the spy, rose from his place at the table, paid for his wine, and went out. In the hall he met Inez.

"So you had time to send away that chap before I came in, my darling?"

"I do not understand you in the least," said the other, earnestly. "What man did I send away?"

"The man in the red *serapé*; you know who I mean, well enough, señora. Then I am to understand that you throw me over?"

"You don't treat me fairly, Fawcett," she said, quickly. "I sent the man away because you and he would have quarreled."

"Why, I don't know the fellow at all. I saw him come in here, that is all. Who is he?"



"I do not know him."

"Little girl! little girl! would you draw the wool over the eyes of Owen Fawcett, who cut his eye-teeth twenty years ago? Don't try it on, for you will fail. You whispered to him to leave the room while your father detained me in the hall."

"The man is jealous of a stranger," said Inez. "What do you mean by accusing me so wrongfully? I will not speak to you for a month."

She flounced out of the hall in great wrath, and Fawcett went away laughing. "Very good," he thought. "The girl will think I am only jealous of him. However, I have earthed my fox and may as well go back and report."

Sanborn had returned to his room by this time, and received the report quietly, and determined to go down to the gambling-house that night and get a closer look at the object of his suspicion. As usual, he went armed and on his guard, as it is advisable for all men to do in a place where jealous Mexicans are as thick as in Santa Fé. As he turned into the alley, two men, wearing the sombrero and serapé, came toward him, and endeavored to pass, one on each side. But he stepped quietly back, keeping them both in front, with a pistol in his hand.

"*That* side, gentlemen," he said, quietly. "I do not allow men to pass me in that way in a dark alley."

"The Americanos are cowards," said one of the men. "Come on, Enrique."

They passed on with a quick step, their hands covered in the folds of the long serapés. Sanborn knew the treacherous nature of the Mexican too well to trust them, and he turned and followed them with his eyes. Seeing that he was on the alert, the Mexicans turned out of the alley and disappeared. But, before he reached the door, they were again close to him, stealing after him with catlike tread. They had hoped to take him napping, but he was a man who had been taught by long experience that he could not trust them, and, as they sprung at him with uplifted knives, the deadly revolver was again turned upon them, with the eye of a dead-shot glancing along the tube.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE ASSASSINS FOILED—AURELIA AND HUGH.

THE two scoundrels saw at once that action only could save them, for the threatening glance of Gabriel Sanborn's eyes spoke volumes and that he would shoot them down like dogs. They were so close to him when he turned that a quick aim was impossible, and yet he fired one shot before they were upon him. The leading assassin spun half-round as the bullet struck him, and the next moment, with a cry like a mad bull, he dashed forward, striking a desperate blow with his long machete. The shining steel barrel of the revolver turned aside the blade, and then that powerful left hand shot out, alighting with stunning force in the face of the assailant, and he went down with a broken jaw and lay writhing upon the road, uttering howls of agony.

In the meantime, his companion struck full at the heart of the young adventurer, and nothing could have saved him from death if the blade had not met one of the flat horn buttons upon the hunting-coat, turning the deadly point aside, inflicting an ugly cut along the ribs. The next moment they grappled and a fierce struggle began. But, few men could stand up long before the iron muscles of Gabriel Sanborn, and the would-be assassin went down and the foot of Sanborn was planted upon his breast.

While in this position three men sprung suddenly into view and assailed the young man with a fierceness seldom seen in Mexicans. They were all armed with bowies and used them skillfully. Gabriel snatched the heavy machete from the hand of the struggling Mexican, and placing his back against the wall, so that they could not get behind him, faced them boldly, a pistol in one hand, the knife—I had almost said sword, for it was quite as formidable—in the other.

"Beware what you do, men," he cried. "I am not easily killed!"



"Down with him!" cried the leader, who was no other than the man in the red serapé, whom he had met that morning. "Cut him to pieces."

Once the pistol cracked, and the second assailant dropped in his tracks, shot through the heart, and the knives clashed together. Sanborn showed a skill and address in the use of the heavy knife of which they had not dreamed. The bright blade seemed to form a living wall of steel about him, while his pistol was held ready to act at a moment's notice. On the other hand the man in the red serapé was no tyro in the use of the bowie, and Sanborn found it hard to guard himself from their united attack.

How the affray would have ended it is impossible to say, but the door of the gambling den suddenly opened, and a light active figure darted out and took a station beside Gabriel, threatening his assailants with a carbine, before which they recoiled in dismay.

"Stand back, murderers," cried a clear, rich voice. "You shall not kill him. Take care; you know how I can shoot."

It was Aurelia, the Wild Huntress of the Rocky Mountains! Her beautiful eyes sparkled like diamonds as they glanced along the barrel of the carbine, and the two men stood, still grasping their weapons, glaring at her in rage and terror.

"Away, both of you," she cried. "Go while there is time. The rangers are coming."

They whirled quickly and darted down the alley. Gabriel would have followed but she restrained him.

"No, no; you are not to follow them, for my sake. Let them escape if they can, since they have not been able to harm you. Oh, heaven, that I should be forced to defend such men as these from the fate they merit."

"Aurelia!" gasped Sanborn. "How did you come here? Where are you staying?"

"Ask me no questions, for I can not answer. Do not stop me, for I dare not be seen speaking with you. Let me go."

"You can not leave me so."

"Your friends are coming," she cried, hurriedly, giving him her hand. "Do not hold me, I beg of you."

She withdrew her hand and darted into the doorway from



which she had emerged. He hurried after her, but a locked door was interposed between him and the object of his pursuit, and the shrill voice of old Lopez demanded what he wanted.

"Open the door, you old thief. How dare you lock it against me?"

"I'll have you before the alcalde if you do not go away," screamed old Lopez. "There is a riot; I am not going to open my doors to-night."

"Fool! if you do not open I will find a way to enter," cried Sanborn. "I tell you that I am no rioter, but if you do not open the door, the rangers will open it for me."

"What do you want?"

"I wish to see the lady who came in just now."

"There is no lady here except my daughter," was the reply.

"I must know that. Ha! there come the boys."

As he spoke, the rangers began to pour into the alley, armed in various ways, clamoring for the men who had assailed Sanborn.

"Open the door, father," said a quiet voice. "It is all right."

Fawcett, who had come with the rest, recognized the voice of Inez.

"The little rascal would not say that unless the birds we came to seek had flown," he said. "We are dished, Cap."

Old Lopez opened the door with a grin, bowing obsequiously to the captain as he entered.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, capitano," he said, "but how was I to know who it was? I heard the fighting; I had a reputation to sustain for keeping an orderly house, and I hope you will do nothing to injure that reputation."

"Bah!" said Sanborn. "Where is the lady who came in here just now?"

"The lady!"

"He knows nothing of her, Señor Capitano," said Inez. "I am the one she came to see, and I helped her to escape, at her request."

"She is gone, then?"

"Yes; she merely passed through the house. She left a



message for you, however; if you will come with me into the next room I will give it to you."

Sanborn followed her without a word, and they entered a room fitted up with all those luxuriant appliances which the richer class of the Mexicans affect.

"Give me the message, quickly. You who are so beautiful ought to make allowance for the impatience of one who loves."

"Ah! you have found out that I am beautiful, señor. I have been told the same by others, but was slow to believe it. Doubtless you are a good judge, so I must take you at your word."

"The message."

"She said, 'Tell him that if he follows me, or seeks to find where I am hidden, he will place me in the greatest peril, even to risk of life. That he must control himself and wait patiently for a better day.' Ah, señor, she loves you."

"Do you think so, dear girl? Do you really believe it?"

"She loves you, and you deserve to be loved, for you are a brave man, and what is more, you are true! There is one of your race who has despised me and treated me as no Mexican woman will be treated without revenge. You hate him, and my hand is weak. Kill him, and earn the lasting gratitude of Inez Lopez."

"What is his name?"

"Some call him Captain Hugh, and he is beautiful and brave, but he has the heart of a snake. He has lied to me. He told me that he loved me, me only, but this beautiful girl has opened my eyes. He persecutes *her* with his love, but she hates him. If she had loved him, I would have killed her."

"I have an account to settle with him, señora, and if we ever meet, be assured the slight he has put upon you shall be avenged."

"A thousand thanks. When you strike him down, say, 'Inez Lopez sends you this.' And now go, and whenever I hear from Aurelia I will send you word."

He raised her hand to his lips, kissed it, and hurried out. Scarcely had he left the room, when a curtain was pushed



aside, and the man in the red serapé entered the room and stood beside her. So silently had he come that she did not see him until he touched her on the arm, saying :

"Inez !"

She sprung away from him with a frightened cry, and he laughed loudly, and flinging off his serapé and sombrero, revealed the face of Hugh Allan. There was a peculiar snake-like glitter in his dark eyes as he looked at her.

"I have come back, Inez. Have you no welcome for me?"

She said not a word, but looked at him fixedly, her fingers opening and closing convulsively upon the hilt of a jeweled stiletto.

"You had better put that down, my darling. Children should not play with edged tools, as the saying is. You will be tempted to use that toy if you do not take care."

"Why do you come back?" she said, in a smothered voice. "Go to your new love, and let her tell you how she—*loves* you. Ha ! ha ! ha !"

"My new love !"

"Perhaps the old. You have been making a fool of Inez Lopez, a toy with whom to while away a passing hour. Fool ! did you think I would suffer it ? Take that !"

As she spoke, the stiletto glittered in the air above his breast, and it was only by the effort of his surprising agility that he saved himself. Before she could recover herself enough to strike again, she was struggling in his grasp, and the dagger lay upon the floor.

"Stand still," he hissed, "unless you would force me to do you a mischief. What does this mean ? Who has turned you against me ?"

"You have done it ; you, and no other. You have sought another, and abandoned me, but I thank the Virgin that she hates you."

"Did she tell you that ?"

"Yes."

He drew her to a seat on the divan and sat down beside her, fixing his beautiful eyes upon her with a look which he well knew how to assume, and before which her own glances fell.



"Release me. I would go and forget that such a being ever lived," she sobbed.

"You have been deceived. Who told you that I did not love you?"

"Aurelia."

"She might have been better employed. Not love *you*, my darling? No other ever possessed my soul as you do, even now, after you have tried to kill me. So, you believed the words of a jealous woman? She had heard in some way that I loved you, and she knew that such a tale as that would drive you to madness."

The eyes of Inez began to blaze like living coals.

"Is this true?"

"Does it not look reasonable? How could I leave you for a pitiful, puling chick like that? I will tell you the truth, my darling. Her uncle and I have interests in common, and I have sometimes held out the hope that I would marry this girl for my own interest. I never loved but one, and that one now sits beside me."

Inez sprung to her feet quickly.

"Wait," she said. "You shall prove your words true."

She darted from the room, and the young man looked uneasily after her. What did she mean to do? He was answered quickly, for the girl appeared, leading Aurelia by the hand.

"The devil!" muttered Hugh. "The fat is in the fire now."

"Look at that man," cried Inez. "He has sworn false oaths to some one, and I would know whether that one is you or I. Do you love him; do you wish to be his wife?"

"Has he said so?"

"He has."

"Then he has lied. From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot he is false flesh and blood. I hate him and he knows it. Dare you say to my face that I desire to be your wife?"

It was an awkward position, and the young man felt it keenly. He looked angrily from one to the other, while Inez waited for his answer.



"Why don't you speak?" cried the Mexican girl, sharply. "Ah, your face condemns you. Liar that you are, you have deceived me for the last time; go."

"I will take a more fitting time to explain this to you, Inez. I—"

"Go."

"You are very pressing. I tell you that—"

"Go, go, I say. I can not endure this very long."

"You send me away then? Very well, the time will come when you will be sorry for it. I go, but you shall see me again."

"You will not leave Santa Fé alive. You shall find that Inez Lopez is not without friends."

"That for your friends," he said, snapping his fingers. "I had intended to deal justly by you, but you will not permit it. To punish you, I tell you that you shall never see me again. *Au revoir*, Aurelia; I shall have some scores to settle with you when we meet again."

"You shall see the day when you will repent in dust and ashes the insult you have offered to me, Señor Hugh Allan," said Inez. "I have a good memory. Now go; my father's hospitality I hold sacred, and you are safe until you leave these walls. After that, beware, for you walk above a volcano, which will surely overwhelm you."

He made a derisive gesture, and walked out, leaving the two girls together. His heart was full of bitter thoughts, for he had risked and lost much in the last four and twenty hours. His plan to take the life of Sanborn had failed, and the proud beauty, Aurelia, had had a share in the work. She had met and foiled him in the moment when his triumph seemed complete, and now she had come between him and Inez, and made her an enemy, and, in spite of his bravado, he knew that she was an enemy not to be despised.

He walked to the door which looked into the gambling-room and stood there unobserved, looking on. The rangers had departed, and only a few men, mostly Mexicans, were playing *monté*. At length a man wrapped in a long cloak came in, and, after standing for moment over one of the tables, walked to the door where Hugh stood, and passed him, giving him a signal to follow, which he obeyed.



They passed into an inner room, and this man removed his hat and showed the stern face of Richard Ingoldsby. Hugh quailed at the savage glance of his piercing eyes.

"I have learned that you have made a fool of yourself as usual, and suffered your passions to lead you astray, Hugh. What is this story I hear about the Mexican girl, Inez?"

"Who has told you any thing?"

"No matter. I have the means of knowing all I wish to know of your movements. You have miserably failed in carrying out my plans against this rascal Sanborn, because you deputed others to do the work, while you dallied the precious time away with Inez Lopez. By —— if every thing fails I will shoot you through the heart."

"You'd better not threaten me."

"Dog! Do you rebel? Why, even now, while you are wasting your time here, Gabriel Sanborn is gathering a band to sweep us from the face of the earth, and he will succeed, if we do not take care. Now mark me. You are not to be trusted. Collect the men and get them out of this accursed town as quickly as possible, and meet me at the three sycamores. Begone!"

Hugh Allan bowed submissively.

"Am I to take Aurelia with me?"

"No; I will see to her. That is another of your blunders. Since you have played a double game you ought to have played it well enough so as not to let her know. Pass the signal to the men, and go."

The signal went forth, and from that hour until midnight men might have been seen stealing out of Santa Fé, taking the north-west route.



## CHAPTER X.

## THE STRUGGLE IN THE VALLEY.

FROM east and west, from north and south, came the trappers and guides, as the word was passed by Tim Badger. They gathered at the call of humanity, and to avenge those who had fallen victims to the rage of the Arapahoes and their white allies.

One by one they came trooping in, each with his own horse and rifle, until Santa Fé was beginning to quake, fearing what these wild borderers might do if their passions should be aroused. But, they were quiet and civil—for them—and, save making night hideous at times, from a too free use of aguardiente and Post whisky, they gave no trouble. The Mexicans gave them a wide berth, and breathed more freely, when a week after the events at the gambling house of Lopez, Gabriel Sanborn led them out of Santa Fé vowing to destroy the band of Painted Post or leave his own bones upon the prairie.

They were not a handsome company to look at. Gold-lace and bullion were scarce in that crowd. They wore every species of garment, from the fanciful dress of the Mexican horseman to the greasy hunting-shirt of buck-skin.

Jack Falstaff's ragged crew, whom he refused to lead through Coventry, were not worse uniformed than these. Their very hats were a study. Some wore the rude beaver-skin cap with the tail attached to the crown—some the broad palm-leaf, or cabbage tree—but the majority sported the sombrero. But, looking over their motley dress, and studying the faces, the most casual observer could see that they were a formidable body. Not one among them but could tell of personal adventure with Indians and grizzlies, enough to fill a book. Few of them who had not faced the dangers of starvation and thirst in the Forty Mile Desert, and in the deep cañons of the Rockies and Sierras. Some had endured the



horrors of captivity among the Indian tribes, and two had been chiefs among the Crows.

They were well armed, each carrying the never-failing rifle, a knife, and one or two revolvers. As to horses, they had the best, descended from that tireless breed which De Soto brought into the New World.

Sanborn rode at their head. He was already very popular among his wild fellows, and his gallant conduct when assailed by the agents of Ingoldsby, in Santa Fé, had added to his glory. Tim Badger was second in command, and the old Texan ranger, Fawcett, was the third officer.

They camped at night behind a clump of thick bushes, and set their guards. After the evening meal, while the men were grouped about the fires, smoking, drinking and playing cards, a scout came in from the west, and Badger brought him at once to Sanborn.

"Painted Post is out again, capt'in," he said. "I've seen him."

"Where was he?"

"'Bout twelve mile to the north, in one of the passes of the foot-hills. He's got a hundred men, and they are laying for a train that is coming down. I'm afeard before we kin git thar they'll take their spelter."

"Pass the word to get ready for a march by moonlight. How many should you say were in this train?"

"Nine in all; four men, two boys, two women and a little gal."

"Is your horse tired?"

"No; he's good for forty mile yet."

"Then ride beside me, and show me the way. If these poor people are destroyed I shall not be able to forgive myself for not moving more quickly."

The rangers were quickly in the saddle, and they rode away rapidly, with the scout who had just come in beside the captain. Mile after mile of prairie was passed, and still they heard no sound of combat.

"We may be in time yet, boys," cried Sanborn. "Ha! listen to that! By Heaven, we are too late!"

There came through the still air of night, far across the prairie, the rapid crack of rifles, and then cries which sounded



indistinctly in their ears across the intervening distance, at least three miles. Then all was still, and the rangers rode on with set teeth and glaring eyes. Soon a smoke like the reek of a furnace appeared, and they pushed on, and came upon a ghastly scene too often repeated upon the prairie.

Two wagons lay overturned upon the grass, and a quantity of furniture for a camp was burning close at hand. One horse, shot through the heart, lay dead upon the sod, and beside him lay his master, a stalwart American, still grasping in his strong right hand a broken gun, with which he must have struck fearful blows before he yielded up his life. He had more than a dozen spear wounds in front, and had died like a brave man, with his face to the foe. He had not been long dead, for the body was still warm. He was scalped.

A few paces nearer the wagons lay a younger man, who had many dreadful wounds upon him, holding in his arms the dead form of a boy not ten years old, whom he had tried to protect. The same spear had impaled both, and the golden hair of the boy was dabbled with his father's blood. Near them was another boy, still breathing, but scalped and gory. Another man, with his arm thrown protectingly across the dead form of a middle-aged woman, lay near at hand. His head had been literally split open by a blow of an ax. The other woman, and the little girl who had been mentioned by the scout, were nowhere to be seen.

"Taken prisoners," said Sanborn. "They at least have been spared."

"They'd far better be lying here with their friends," said Tim Badger, sadly. "Them devils have done their work and are off, and we kain't foller to-night, or as sure as guns we'll run our heads into an ambush."

"This is a terrible sight, Tim. I wish I had not seen it."

"I've seen worse," said Tim. "I've seen men tied to the stake, burning arrers shot into the flesh, flayed with red-hot knives, and tortured with knives and hatchets until the fiends got tired of the bloody work. Better thet these poor people should die quick than to live fur thet. Git to work, boys, and bury the poor critters. Hyar, Cap, this little chap seems to have life in him yet."

"But he is scalped. Surely he can not live."



"Don't you believe that! I've seen men live that had been scalped; but, perhaps the little chap ain't got strength to ker-ry him through."

While the rest buried the unfortunates who were already dead, Tim and the captain lifted the boy, and laid him upon a soft couch of robes, and looked at his wounds. He had been stunned by a blow from a club and then scalped. Beyond that, his injuries were trifling. Tim produced a healing salve much in use among the trappers, and then, procuring a piece of linen cloth, he wrapped it carefully about the boy, who was left with a ranger to watch him. One of the dead men upon being searched, was found to belong to the great Masonic order, and, as they laid him in the grave, Sanborn, himself a Mason, read over his grave the beautiful burial service of that fraternity. The trappers uncovered their heads solemnly, as the deep rich voice of their captain toned out those words:

"While we drop the sympathetic tear over the grave of our deceased brother, let us cast around his foibles—whatever they may have been—the broad mantle of Masonic charity; nor withhold from his memory the commendation which his virtues demand at our hands. Perfection on earth has never yet been attained; the wisest as well as the best of men have gone astray. Suffer, therefore, the apologies of poor human nature to plead for those who can no longer extenuate for themselves. To the grave we have consigned the body of our deceased brother, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Alas! my brother."

The voice ceased, the earth dropped upon the dead forms, and the victims of human greed and cruelty were at rest. During the night the boy died, and was laid beside the rest, and at early morning the party struck the trail of the Indians, and rode hard. The trail led to that pass in the foot hills by which Richard Ingoldsby's cabin was reached, and Tim looked meaningly at his captain.

"Just as I thought, Cap. That p'ison thief is in it, and unless I'm mighty wrong, we hev got our beauties in a trap. They can't git out."

"Get ready, men," cried the captain. "The enemy is before us. Think of all the wrongs and sufferings this Arapa



no band has inflicted upon the whites; think of last night's cruel scene, and follow me."

"We will," responded the rangers. "Only lead the way, that's all."

"Tim Badger, pick out twenty of the best men and form them in files of four, in front. All who are ready to take the lead in this business, three paces to the front."

The whole band moved out the required distance.

"This won't do," said the captain, with a smile. "They all want to go. Take the first twenty-five."

The men were quickly selected, and took the lead, with the captain at their head. Behind them came eighty more stalwart rangers, eager for the fight, their weapons ready for the charge. A mile was passed without alarm, and they began to think that they were to reach the valley without an assault, when, from every tree and bush along the pass, a stream of fire leaped out into their ranks. Three men in the advance guard went down to rise no more, and a compact body of footmen, armed with rifles, the favorite weapon of the border, marched out in their rear, while at the same moment, about seventy horsemen charged in front.

"Forward all!" cried Sanborn. "Never mind the footmen. These are the men we seek. Give it to them, and then out knives and revolvers."

A terrible volley swept through and decimated the ranks of the Arapahoes; the rangers charged through the smoke and were upon the horsemen, firing right and left with the terrible revolvers, or striking with their bowies. Sanborn raged like a lion, seeking everywhere for Painted Post or Hugh Allan. Every man who came in his way went down. He was twice wounded by lance-thrusts, but heeded it no more than the prick of a pin. A great Arapaho rushed at him, wielding a terrible ax, and dashing in so quickly that the stroke was harmless, the captain drove his bowie to the hilt in the bosom of his savage adversary, tearing the ax from his hand as he did so. The Indian fell with a horrible groan; while shaking the ax above his head, the gallant young man darted into the ranks of the Indians, dealing blows like a madman. It was more than they could bear, and they broke and fled up the valley, leaving more



than half their number dead or dying upon the trampled sod.

The rangers would have followed, but the voice of the captain restrained them.

"The footmen now!" he cried. "Remember last night!"

The robbers who were on foot had taken no part in the combat so far, because they dare not use their weapons for fear they might injure their friends. Now their weapons began to crack and Sanborn saw that he had different men to deal with.

"Look out, Cap," yelled Tim. "Them ain't Injins; they shoot too straight."

"Charge," cried Sanborn. "We must not wait another volley."

The trappers charged at the word, and their enemies melted away before them, burying themselves in the bushes, and from their shelter discharging their weapons into the ranks of the horsemen.

"Fall back!" cried Sanborn. "Into the valley and get out of their sight."

"How many do you reckon them to be, Tim?" demanded the captain, when his orders had been obeyed.

"Fifty."

"Very good. Dismount fifty men, and let them load their revolvers. Those who have none borrow them. We must fight the devil with fire, and if we can not charge into the bushes on horseback, we can on foot. The rest of you stay and guard the horses, and if the Indians form again give them Bunker Hill."

Fifty men were soon selected, who dismounted and picketed their horses in the water-bed, out of sight of the pass. Fawcett was left in charge of the horse-guard, and then fifty rangers, armed with revolvers and knives, sprung into the pass with yells which might have shamed the Arapahoes. They expected a volley as they passed the mouth of the cut, but they were agreeably disappointed. Into the bushes they plunged, and searched madly up and down but found nothing except dead and wounded. Had their enemies sunk into the earth? Tim Badger was inclined to be superstitious, and cast furtive glances about him, but not an enemy was in sight.



"Now, confound my cats, if this don't beat cock-fighting all to pieces," growled the scout. "Whar ar' they? Come out and be men, you cowards! Don't sneak; that's *too* mean, you know. I wouldn't sneak, if I was you, no-how."

Mocking laughter was the only reply, but not a shot was fired nor did an enemy appear in view. They searched everywhere, all about the pass, but they searched in vain. Not a trace of the enemy was left, and Sanborn gave the order to march back to the horses.

"Now don't this beat all natur'," said Tim. "Whar do you s'pose they be?"

"I can not think. They know more of these passes than we possibly can. By the way, send two men to bring that body here—one of the footmen."

Two men ran into the pass and dragged the body out. As far as paint and finery was concerned, it might have been an Indian; but Sanborn, dipping up water in his hand, washed the paint from the face and showed that it was indeed a white man, as Tim had suggested. Badger at once recognized the features as those of a man who had been a frequenter of the Lopez gambling-den.

"Just so," said Tim. "Now, ef we could wash every devilish one of them footmen we'd find they'd turn white, just like this chap. Now we ar' in the business, s'pose we go to work and clean out the rest of them 'Rapahoes.'"

"Ay, ay," yelled the rangers.

"That's the ticket, Tim!"

"Where are they?"

"Oh, we'll find 'em crouching somewhere up at the other end, of course. I can't be easy till they've gone under."

Gabriel gave the order to mount; the men sprung eagerly into the saddle, and following their leader through the valley, they swept by the hut of Ingoldsby at a mad gallop. From this point the whole valley lay before them, but it was tenantless. Not an enemy was in sight.

"They are in the woods," cried Gabriel, "and we must have them out. The same fifty dismount and clear the woods."

They obeyed and plunged into the covert, weapons in



mand. A few anxious moments followed, and then they began to appear again one by one, with disappointment imprinted upon every face. Like their white companions, the Indians and their horses had disappeared. Where had they gone?

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE RANGERS BAFFLED.

THE rangers stood looking at one another in wonder and dismay. Twice had their enemies seemed to fade out of existence, leaving no sign of their whereabouts. Numbers of their dead and wounded lay scattered about, but no living person could they see. As they gazed, the door of the hut opened, and Aurelia came out and was greeted with a shout of surprise by the rangers, and signing to his men to stand firm, Gabriel stepped eagerly forward to meet her. She greeted him coldly and asked him why he was here.

"Can you ask me that, Aurelia? If you had heard the tales of savage butchery which daily come into Santa Fé, you would wonder why we had not come before, not why we are here now. We seek to punish Painted Post the Arapaho, and revenge the death of many innocents."

"Have you done so?"

"We have done something toward it. Yonder, at the mouth of the cañon, lie the bodies of over forty braves and ten of their villainous white companions. They at least will never rob or murder again."

"You have done your work. Return then, and leave us in peace."

"I can not return, while a man of this ill-omened band lives. Not even you shall turn me back. Can it be possible that you love this Hugh Allan, bloodthirsty wretch that he is?"

"Love *him*? You do well to ask me that question, Gabriel. Go; I have been deceived in you."

"I beg your pardon. I was mad to doubt you, but it seems so strange that you should wish to shield him."



"It is not because I wish to do that, but because I know that you are in terrible danger while you remain in this place. Go away, I beg you, while there is yet time, and above all, do not set foot in this cabin. Avoid it, as you would a pestilence. And, be sure of this: you seek in vain the haunts of the band of Painted Post. He is too cunning for you."

"You could tell me, if you chose."

"How can I, when I am bound by a solemn oath not to do so?"

"A bad oath may be broken."

"Not by me. Good-by, and remember, do not set foot in the cabin."

"I can not promise. No stone shall remain unturned which will aid me in finding the hiding-place of this villainous band."

"I entreat you to keep out of it, as you value your life."

"My life is not my own. It is given to the cause of vengeance," said Gabriel, solemnly. "If I lay it down now, it is the will of Heaven."

She covered her face with her hands for a moment, and then, with a cry of anguish darted back into the building and Gabriel followed quickly. He caught a glimpse of her garments as they fluttered into the building, and then the sound of bolts and bars were heard.

"What are you doing?" cried a voice which sounded strangely hollow and indistinct. "Leave it open, girl."

"I will not," she answered, boldly. "Here I stay, and if they must perish, I die with them."

"The devil is in the girl," cried the same voice. "Up with you, Hugh, and bring her down."

"Let Hugh Allan dare to show his head and he is a dead man," cried Aurelia, boldly. "Here, Nero; watch them, boy."

The rattling of a chain was heard, and a stealthy step. Gabriel looked in at the casement and saw her sitting upon a stool in the middle of the room, her carbine laid across her lap, and her eyes fixed upon a square trap in the floor, which was open. Beside this opening crouched the jaguar, his burning eyes peering into the cavity.

"You shall repent this, girl," cried the same hoarse voice. "Open that door, and come down here at once."



"I will not do it at your bidding. I can die, and I will die willingly, if by so doing I can save the lives of many. The jaguar watches beside the trap, my carbine is loaded, and would kill even you for that attempt."

"Brave girl," muttered Gabriel. "They can not frighten her."

"Then if you have any prayers to say, say them quickly, for you have not five minutes to live. We can not wait."

"Do your will, Richard Ingoldsby. I have been true to you in many an evil hour, and my life is in your hands."

A loud click came up from below in answer to her words, and half the floor on which she sat seemed to sink out of sight at once, and with a cry of horror, Gabriel saw her go down into the black depths, while a laugh of derision came up from below. The jaguar uttered an angry snarl and sprung down through the trap, which closed of itself, and that portion of the floor which had sunk out of sight rose slowly into view, to all appearance as firm as ever.

"More jugglery," thought Gabriel. "Oh, heaven! they have not killed her; they dare not do that! Axes, men, and down with this thrice accursed door."

The men rushed forward with axes and bars, and used them with a will. The doors came crashing in, and the men would have rushed on, but the captain restrained them.

"Steady, boys; they have set a trap for us here, but we will not be so foolish as to rush into it. Catch one or two of those horses for me, will you."

The men quickly brought him two of the Indian ponies, and by the direction of the captain, drove them in over the shattered door, lashing them vigorously. The ponies rushed in tumultuously, and hardly had the sound of their feet been heard, when the floor went down as before, and the horses disappeared as if by magic.

"Ha!" cried Gabriel, "you see I was right, after all. It will not do for us to venture upon that floor. One thing we can do which I think will disarrange their machinery. We can burn the nest down, and we will do it."

"But the lady," said one of the men.

"They are not in the building, I think. At any rate I will give them warning."



He stepped to the door and shouted at the top of his voice :

"Attention, Richard Ingoldsby. I know you are there, and now listen to me. I am going to burn this den over your heads, so that, if you wish to save yourself, come out and give yourself up."

No answer ; only the echo of his voice replied. A cold air seemed to rise from beneath the cabin.

"Once for all, will you speak before we fire the house?"

"Fire it, if you like. We will not give up," cried a hollow voice below him. "We don't fear you."

"We kin tear down the house in half an hour, if you like, Cap. I don't think the little gal is in any danger, but I don't like to resk fire," said Tim.

"Down with it, then. Give me an ax."

"No ; leave that to the men I pick out. A good hand with an ax don't grow on every bush. Tracy, Ingalls, Butts, Neddy, Fatty, Tubbs and Gilliflower ; go fur that shanty, and let's see how quick you kin lay it low."

The men designated swung their axes and went to work. First they climbed upon the roof, and the rough thatch went off in double-quick time. Log by log was severed, until they reached the lower floor, which was formed of pine boards. Through this they cut their way, and revealed the stringers on which the floor was laid. These they quickly severed at one end, and the rangers took hold and tore up the floor, the under part of which was a complete network of bolts and traps. Gabriel understood how Aurelia had been defeated in her plan to keep them out of the house. The floor, when torn out, revealed a shallow cellar, in the middle of which was a sort of slanting pit, leading downward at an angle of forty-five degrees. A few steps down the inclined plane lay several wooden kegs, such as are used for gunpowder, and from each keg a slow match extended downward.

"By Jehosaphat !" said Tim, "they are ready for us. We don't dare go down into that hole, or they'll lift us four thousand feet into the air."

"Why don't you come on, boys?" cried the voice of Ingoldsby. "It isn't very warm down here, but we can make it warmer."



"Come out and face us, if you are men," shouted Sanborn.

"Oh yes. But we are not that sort of person, Mr. Gabriel Sanborn, Captain of Rangers."

"Cowards."

"Precisely. We are such cowards that when we get a good thing, we keep it. Why don't you come down? We will make you very welcome. Some of us would be very glad to see you."

"Stay there and starve. Here we camp until you are ready to come out, if it is a year."

"You know nothing of our resources, my dear fellow. We shall not starve yet. By a moderate calculation we have food enough for a year, and no end of water. Besides, when we get ready to leave this place we intend to go."

"Fall back, boys," said Gabriel, quietly. "This sort of talk is of no use, but I will have them out of that somehow. Make a camp in that grove; it seems the best place. The men must stand sentry by turns, and remember that there must be no sleeping on duty, for we have a wily enemy to deal with."

The rangers obeyed orders and made a camp in the woods. They had hardly done so, when the arrows began to rain down upon them from the side of the mountain to the west, which was scarcely a hundred yards distant. The men all rushed for their rifles, but the moment they showed themselves, a perfect cloud of barbed shafts drove them back to cover, many of them severely wounded. They brought their rifles to bear upon the mountain side, and whenever an Indian showed himself, he suffered for his temerity.

"Curse the Injins," said Tim. "They are bound to make us trouble, spite of all we kin do."

"They must be dislodged," said Gabriel. "I want thirty men for the work."

The number was soon made up, and instructing the rest to keep up a steady fire, the thirty mounted and rode out of sight. A half-hour after, they appeared again, on foot, creeping along the mountain side toward the place where the Indians were sending the arrows into the camp.

"Thar they go," cried Tim, as he saw the brave fellows spring down the rocks and engage in a hand-to-hand con-



flict with the Indians. "Cease firing and leave it to the Cap."

The struggle was short, sharp and bloody. In five minutes the Indians melted away through the passes, which they knew so well, leaving ten of their number dead upon the hillside, and the victorious party returned to the place where they had left their horses.

"The darned thieves won't hev many Injins to help 'em ef we keep on," said Tim, as he applied a little ointment to an arrow wound in his wrist. "I'll bet thar ain't thirty left. Hez any one see'd Painted Post anywhar?"

"He were on the hill," said Fawcett. "I got a lick at him, but he got away. I think I marked him, though."

"We'll hear from them ag'in to-night," said Tim. "That Ingoldsby ain't a coward, and like ez not he'll come out of his hole and take a drive at us."

"Do you think so?" demanded Sanborn. "A strong party must be set to guard the opening. They must not be allowed to escape. Ingoldsby owes me a debt which he must repay before I go back to Santa Fé."

"What does he owe you fur?" asked Tim.

"The price of two lives, the lives of those dearer to me than my own," was the stern reply.

"Then he won't pay you, if he kin help, but we'll see what we kin do to prevail on him to pay up. It beats all natur' what power he hez over that purty gal. She ain't a bit like him, but somehow he makes her do jest as he likes."

"I can not understand it myself. She—"

"Thar she comes, Cap," said Tim, interrupting him.

Gabriel started to his feet and saw Aurelia approaching, from the direction of the cañon. He looked at her in silent amazement. An hour before he had see her fall through the trap, and now she was here, coming from the opposite direction.

"You here, Aurelia? Then you were not injured by the fall?"

"No, Gabriel, no," she said; "I was frightened, but not in the least hurt. You must by this time see how utterly powerless you are to injure these men whom you seek. They have a secure retreat and know its secrets well. They



could hold it against a thousand men and are amply provisioned. Why should you waste time and lives in useless efforts?"

"We can not go back, Aurelia. The account between Richard Ingoldsby and myself is of long standing and must be settled. How did you get out of their retreat?"

"I can not tell you that. I have trusted to your honor to let me go as I have come, unquestioned and alone. Ingoldsby has commissioned me to say that he will not give himself up, and to describe to you their situation. Upon my honor, without the clue to their retreat, you can not harm them. They will harass you, cut your men off one by one, and in the end destroy you."

"We have the best of them so far. We have only lost six men killed outright and fifteen or twenty wounded. How many of the Indian allies of Ingoldsby are left alive?"

"You have slain many, but he does not depend much upon the Indians. When they are all dead, he will yet have nearly as many men as you, and desperate white men at that. I beg you to reconsider your determination, and consent to leave this place."

"I can not do it. My vow is given to God to avenge the innocent and I will do it. Aurelia, there is in the hands of these base men a woman and a child, who are prisoners. They were taken last night. I charge you to guard that woman from these bad men, for she is now alone."

"Do you know her?"

"I do not. But we last night buried the mangled forms of all the party save this woman and child. You have power in this wild band; protect them."

"I will do it, even at the risk of my life. Now I must return, and you must promise not to follow or attempt to have me watched. This secret must not be learned through me."

"Let me walk with you a little way."

She assented, with a slight inclination of her head. And he walked by her side to the mouth of the cañon. Here he paused, and drawing her to his side pressed his lips to hers. As he did so there came a rushing sound, a stunning blow, and all was dark.



## CHAPTER XII.

## THE BARRICADE ASSAILED. IN DANGER.

AN hour passed. The captain did not return, and the rangers began to be anxious. Half a dozen men went out in turn and looked anxiously in the direction he had taken, but no sign of him was visible. Where had he gone?"

"Tell you what, Tim," said Fawcett, "that gal has led the captain into a trap."

"You shet up, Oney Fawcett! You don't know that the gal loves the ground the captain walks on for his sake. If he's got into trouble, 'tain't any fault of her'n, I tell you."

"What'll we do?"

"Do? You stay hyar, Oney, and keep camp. Slippery Pete and Sam Silverskin, come with me."

The two guides selected by these euphonious names stepped out at once and took their rifles. There was light enough as yet to follow a trail, and Slippery Pete, who had a nose like a hound, at once took the lead. It was plain enough, for the two had walked side by side as only lovers walk, and the party quickly reached the mouth of the cañon. Here the grass was bent and trodden down, and there was a place where a heavy body had fallen and a few drops of blood.

"Some of those or'nary cusses, Dick Ingoldsby or Captain Hugh, hev got him, by the mortal," whispered Tim. "See here, and here, and here! Not less than six men set on him at once. Here's where the gal stood and she fought like a trump. Oh, cuss and scold all robbers like Dick Ingoldsby and Hugh Allan!"

"What's next, Tim?" demanded Slippery Pete. "Shell we foller the trail."

"'Twon't do; they've got a trap sot fur us by this, and we'd never git out alive. It'll be dark in half an hour, and we couldn't git fairly into the passes afore it was darker than the pit. Come back, fur they'll give us enuff to do afore mornin'."



They hurried back, and many axmen at once set to work, fortifying a camp out of bow-shot of the mountain side. Their experience of the morning had warned them that it was not safe for them to remain close to the mountain. A rude barrier was quickly erected, strong enough to shield the men from rifle-shots, and then guards were stationed and the men slept upon their arms..

The outer circle of guards were posted about four hundred yards from the camp, and had their instructions not to fire a shot upon the appearance of the enemy, but to give a signal whistle and retreat. About twelve o'clock this whistle was heard, and the guards appeared, stealing toward the stockade, stooping low, so as not to be seen by the enemy.

The rangers were on the alert in a moment, and, lying prostrate behind their barrier, with their rifles ready, waited for the coming of the foe. Soon dark forms could be seen creeping along the ground, shielding themselves behind every knoll and fallen log or giant boulder, approaching the camp by slow and sure degrees. These were the advance guard, the Indian braves led by Painted Post, who hope to avenge the slaughtered braves who had fallen during the day.

"Wait tell you kin see thar eyes, boys," was the word which passed among the rangers. "When they gather for the rush, give 'em hail Kolumby!"

Scarcely a hundred yards separated the creeping Indians from the camp, and behind them came another and stronger body of men, moving with scarcely less caution, who halted about two hundred yards distant and disappeared. Eighty yards, sixty, fifty the Indians gained, and then there was a pause; they evidently were preparing their weapons for a rush. Up they sprung and bounded suddenly toward the barricade. As they did so, a muttered command was heard and a stream of fire encircled the barricade. Many of the savages fell, and the rest wavered for a moment and then sprung on with vengeful yells. But, all the rifles were not empty, and forty bullets met them when they were hardly ten paces from the barricade. Scarcely twenty reached it alive. Knives flashed, pistols cracked, axes gleamed, and the Indians were literally obliterated, before their white companions could raise a hand to aid them.



As the outlaws became satisfied of this, they came on gallantly, reserving their fire, but the rifles of the rangers began to play upon them with deadly effect. Several of them dropped before they reached the barricade, and when they came to it, they found it crowned by a bristling hedge of steel knives, hatchets and revolvers. The rangers fought at an advantage, their bodies being covered by the logs, and the construction of the barricade was really admirable. Ingoldsby was the first to perceive that he could gain nothing, and, at his command, the assailants melted away from the front of the intrenched camp, leaving many of their number dead and wounded upon the sod.

Torches were procured, and the victors went out to view the field. Within the first fifty yards they found all that had remained of the band of Painted Post except the wounded, who had been carried away by their white associates. Tim searched everywhere for the chief himself, but the Indian, with characteristic good-fortune, had contrived to make his escape.

"He's got off," said Tim, "but I don't reckon they'll try that ag'in, in a hurry. They waked up the wrong camp, that time. I'm afeard it will go hard with the capt'in when they go back. Let's see arter the wounded, and then post guards ag'in."

Although quite a number were wounded, not a man was killed outright. The guides were skillful in curing cuts and gunshot wounds. Most of the wounded had suffered from hatchets and knives. These were quickly attended to, and then, after posting their guards, the rangers slept as peacefully as if no thought of danger had ever come near them.

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Where was Gabriel Sanborn? After he was beaten down by that terrible blow, he had not recovered consciousness for some time. When consciousness came back, he was lying in a dimly-lighted room of vast dimensions, in a strangely cold atmosphere. His head was swathed in bandages, and he felt a pain shooting through his temples. When he attempted to rise, he fell back, dizzy and confused. A soft hand was at once placed upon his forehead, and the sweet voice of **Arrelia** said:



"Do not attempt to move ; you are badly hurt."

"Where am I?"

"You are in the hands of your enemies. You were struck down by a blow from the butt of a rifle in the hands of Hugh Allan. He shall repent the cowardly act, and that before long."

"What is this place?"

"The robbers' haunt. Do not try to talk too much, and speak low, for four armed men are within sound of my voice, who have orders to shoot you if you attempt to escape."

"Where are the rest?"

"They have gone to attack the rangers in their camp."

"Great heaven ! and I am lying here a useless hulk ! How long have they been gone?"

"About two hours. Unless I am much mistaken, they are returning now."

She was right. In the course of half an hour the men came in, carrying their wounded comrades with them, some twenty in number. They trooped into the great room with tumult and curses, casting angry looks at the recumbent figure of Sanborn.

"They have been defeated again," whispered Aurelia. "I can see it in their faces, and only see how many of them are hurt. I wonder where my uncle and Hugh Allan can be ? Surely, they have not fallen !"

As she spoke, the two appeared, supporting a wounded man between them. It was Painted Post, the Arapaho. His bronzed countenance seemed to have turned to an ashy yellow, and he had two ghastly wounds, one in the head and one in the breast. At a glance it was plain that he had not long to live. The two men placed him upon a pile of skins, where he lay breathing feebly, and the look of determination which an Indian warrior assumes, imprinted upon his face.

Ingoldsby advanced to the side of Sanborn with a menacing look upon his cruel face.

"You see all this, sir," he said, savagely. "You see these groaning men, this gashed and dying chief. He has been a true friend to me, much as he may have injured your accursed race, and I will revenge him upon you."



"I am in your hands, murderer. Do with me as you like."

"Murderer!"

"Ay, murderer. You know that I do not refer to the life of crime which you have been leading since you fled from the East to avoid the penalty of your guilt, but to that deed which exiled you, and which has set its mark upon you unmistakably."

"Of what do you accuse me?"

"Dare you ask that? Dare you look me in the face—me—the son of your victims, and say that word?"

"His son—*his*?"

"His and no other! Ah, these hands laid him in the grave, these eyes wept bitter tears as my mother was placed beside him; and I made a vow *never* to cease from following you until you or I were dead, and I will keep my word."

"It is false!" cried Ingoldsby, hoarsely. "Aurelia, he lies! Look in his face and tell him so."

"I can not, uncle. I fear, oh, I fear he speaks the truth."

"I tell you it is true—true as Heaven, true as the woman who died for love of the husband you so basely killed," cried Gabriel.

"Who will stop his mouth?" cried Ingoldsby. "I can not look him in the face and kill him; some of you do it."

"Kill him?" cried Aurelia, starting up and laying her hand upon a pistol. "Let me see the man among you boid enough to lay a finger on a *dying* man. You dare not, for your lives!"

"Would you defend him, Aurelia?"

"Defend him? Yes! As I would defend yonder dying Indian if the same threats were made against his life. You shall not injure him, when I am by."

"Take her away, Hugh. There is work to do which she must not see. Go with your future husband, Aurelia."

"My husband? Do you think I would marry a blood-stained thing like this?"

"You *shall* marry him, as soon as we can find a Padre. The play is played out. We must leave the West and you ~~shall~~ only leave it as his wife."

"I ~~will~~ die first. Keep off, Hugh Allan. You know me



and that I will keep my word with you. Advance a step, and you are dead.

Hugh recoiled from the muzzle of the leveled weapon in dismay, and looked at his superior.

"She would do it, Dick. I dare not touch her."

"He seeks to marry me, when he knows he does not love me, but Inez Lopez in Santa Fé. I have always hated him and now I hate him worse."

"I can't stand this, Dick," cried Hugh, fiercely. "You take her out of the way or I shall do her a mischief. She knows that I never loved any other than herself."

"It is false."

"I tell you that it is true. I have seen Inez; I have talked with her, and she told me her sad story. You have cruelly deceived her."

"It is false, girl, false; you say this to cover your love for the fellow who lies bleeding here, and who is to die this night. Who says that I ever spoke of love to Inez?"

"Inez herself," cried a rich voice. All turned and saw the Mexican girl standing in the high arched doorway, looking fixedly at them, her finger pointing at the face of Hugh Allan

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## CHAPTER XIII

### L'ENVOI!

WE left the rangers resting on their arms after the terrible fight with the Indians and their not less savage allies. They were not allowed to rest long, for one of the guards came in, and announced that a woman had ridden up and asked to speak with the commander, and that he had made bold to bring her in. Fawcett and Badger rubbed their eyes and sat up, and saw, just behind the guard, a form which Fawcett recognized—Inez Lopez, the Santa Fe beauty.

"Oh, blame my cats, Tim, if that ain't Inez. Come here, little gal, and let's hear from you."

"I am not here to bandy words with you, but to give you



help in finding out the secret haunt of your enemies. Would you find it, and rescue your captain, who is to die before the night is over? I know all their secrets."

"Thunderation! How do you know that, Inez?"

"No matter how I know. It is enough that it is true, and that only you can save him from death. Will you do it?"

"You try us, gal. We only lay still to-night because we didn't know the way, and might run into something sharp in the dark. You say you know the way?"

"Yes."

"And you give me your word to guide us safe?"

"Upon one condition."

"And what is that?"

"Leave the man called Captain Hugh to me. Let no man kill him until it is certain I can not do it."

"Agreed; not a man will lift a hand against him unless he is likely to escape. Will that suit you?"

"Si. Take all your men, although the band has been badly cut up, and are sadly demoralized by their late misfortunes. When we met last, I refused to tell you any thing about them. Now I am ready to betray them, and I tell you that they are made up of the dregs of the people of New Mexico. All who have done murder, who are under the ban of the law for any hideous crime, are sure of a welcome here. For three years they have made their haunt in these passes, gathering whenever their leader, Dick Ingoldsby sent out his ring among them. He is the master spirit, and Hugh Allan is his right hand. They are well mated, for the cool and cunning brain of Ingoldsby will conceive miracles of cruelty, and Captain Hugh will execute them without remorse. You have no conception of the number of murders, laid at the door of the Indians, which these men have done. All is prey which comes to their net. Traps, rifles, blankets or gold, is all one to them. They have an agent in Austin and another at St. Louis, to whom they consign the articles taken from the trappers, and they are sold again to other trappers and are brought back here perhaps to be taken a second time. A human life is nothing to them, if taking it will gain them the value of a beaver-skin. You know now with whom you have to deal, so show them no mercy."



"All the men must go," said Tim, sternly. "Pass the word, Oney, and tell them to load up all their barkers. If we let one of the critters go, we deserve to die ourselves. You know this gal best, Fawcett; kin we trust her?"

"To the death," replied Fawcett. "She never broke her faith to man or woman."

The eyes of the strange girl filled with tears. "I wish I had been kinder to you Owen," she said, softly, so that only he could hear. "I have wasted my heart's love upon an unworthy object, and you see, what comes of it. Get your men ready as soon as you can Señor Badger."

That did not take long. In ten minutes' time the band were upon the march. By the recommendation of Inez, ten brave men were left to guard the entrance, which had passed through the house, and the rest marched after Tim and Fawcett. They took the course for the pass where the first battle had taken place, and in front walked Inez, a pistol in her hand, showing the way.

They reached the pass, and halted upon the spot where the band had disappeared.

"Wait here," whispered Inez. "Let me go in front for a moment."

They obeyed, screening themselves under the shadow of the rock. Inez flitted on before, and two minutes after they heard a blow, and the sound of a falling body, close at hand. Soon after Inez appeared again, replacing a knife in her belt and beckoning to them to come in. They advanced in silence, and she led them to a huge spruce, the trailing branches of which swept the ground. Pushing the branches which rested against the rocks, aside, she passed through, followed by the rangers in single file, and they found themselves moving through a fissure in the rock, so narrow that there was barely room for one man to pass through. After marching a few feet they came upon the body of a man, not long dead, who lay upon his back in the fissure. He had been stabbed to the heart, and his blood had not yet ceased to flow.

"I killed him," said Inez, pointing downward. "If you were to search him, you would find upon him two scalps, one of them torn from the head of a child not ten years old. Think you he deserves to die?"



There was a murmur of approval among those who heard her, and they passed on. The fissure extended about five hundred yards, when it widened, and they came out into a valley about the same size as the one they had left. Here Inez stopped them by a gesture of her hand, and beckoned Fawcett closer.

"Behind yonder rock," she whispered, "stands a second guard. He must be removed, and silently. The word by which you must answer him is 'Gold.' You must do this work."

Fawcett loosened the bowie in his belt and stepped forward resolutely. The rest shrunk back out of sight. As Fawcett turned the angle of the rock a dark figure sprung up saying in a low tone.

"Who comes?"

"A friend."

"What is the aim of friendship?"

"Gold."

"All right; come on," said the sentry.

"What are they doing inside?"

"They are going to finish that Captain Sanborn, I believe. Our Aurelia will make a devil of a fuss, I suppose, but she will have to give up. Who are you?"

"Don't you know me?" said Fawcett, still approaching.

"No; it's so cursed dark. I wish they'd send some one out to relieve me, for I'd like to have a hand in punishing that captain."

"You would; why?"

"It would do me good to hear him groan—to see his blood flow—for he has destroyed the band."

"And you'd like to be relieved?"

"Yes."

"Then *I'll* relieve you, you bloody-minded miscreant."

The knife was in his breast. He made a forward step, looked wildly at his slayer, and fell without a groan.

"So; *he* is ended," muttered Fawcett. "Who shall say he did not deserve his fate?"

He stepped to the angle of the rock and beckoned; the men were quickly by his side, and with Inez again at the head, they passed into a natural subterranean passage leading



into the mountain. Not a word was spoken now, and they followed their conductor in silence until voices were heard, and she laid her hand upon Fawcett's arm. He in turn touched the next man, and the signal was passed back until all had halted. She then went forward alone, and when Hugh Allan demanded who had said that he had ever spoken of love to Inez Lopez, she answered, and at the same moment gave the signal to advance! The rangers began to pour into the great room, firing as they filed in, and dropping their rifles for revolvers as they did so. That terrible attack, so sudden, so unexpected, paralyzed the ruffians, and most of them fled from the room, at the back. About twenty resolute men grouped about Hugh Allan and Ingoldsby, and fought like demons, for life or death. Aurelia, at the first alarm, had put a revolver into the hand of Sanborn, and he sat coolly, waiting his chance, though too weak to rise.

"You she devil," hissed Allan, as he pointed a pistol at Inez. "*You* have betrayed us. Take your death."

The pistol exploded, and Inez reeled and would have fallen, but Fawcett caught her in his arms. Then Sanborn took a steady aim at Ingoldsby and brought him down. Hugh turned like a fiend upon Aurelia, and pointed a weapon at her breast, when a yellow ball gleamed before their eyes and the jaguar alighted upon his breast and bore him to the ground. He fought hard, and plunged his bowie into the breast of the tiger repeatedly, but the fangs were fixed in his throat, and his hand fell nerveless at his side. The jaguar crawled to the feet of his mistress, fawned upon her, then fell dead.

Badger, with others, had pursued the flying enemy, but all at once they came back, with terror depicted upon their faces.

"Take up the capt'in, boys," he cried. "Out, the rest of you. Thar ain't a moment to loose. The trains are all afire!"

Every one obeyed. Half a dozen men seized the captain, and carried him out. Aurelia hurried out with the rest, and Fawcett followed, carrying Inez. They had scarcely cleared the passage when there came a tremendous explosion, and a thick column of smoke, mixed with rocks and earth, ascended, and when it sunk again the cavern was a shapeless mass of



ruins, and the entrance blocked by thousands of tons of earth and rock.

"There," cried Tim. "*That* was a close shave! We chased 'em to the other entrance and our boys commenced firing at them, and I thought of the powder kags, and give the word to the boys to dig out. Good gracious, Oney, what's the matter with the gal?"

"Shot," groaned Fawcett, "killed by that black devil, Hugh Allan, who has gone down to the blackest pit."

"Poor girl," said Gabriel. "Hers was a sad fate, for she died by the hand of the man who, of all others on earth, should have been most tender to her. See, my friend; under yonder pile of rocks and earth lies the body of the man whom I hated most on earth, Richard Ingoldsby."

"Let me explain a little, friends, and you will understand why I pursued this man through these years. My father and he were friends long ago, but they loved the same woman. She chose the one and discarded the other. Ingoldsby left the neighborhood, but he wrote to my father, telling him that he had not forgotten, and at the proper time would take vengeance on him. When I was fifteen years old he struck the blow. My father was murdered in his own house at night, and by his side was a paper upon which, in the handwriting of Ingoldsby, was written these words: 'After many years, I am revenged!' My mother had loved her husband, and in a few days followed him to the grave. I was young, but I was old enough to receive impressions, and over the graves of my parents I swore never to rest until I had brought Richard Ingoldsby to justice or killed him. In his flight this man had taken certain papers which involved the right to a large estate. His object in doing this I have never been able to learn, unless he knew their value to me. At the same time another heir to the property, a girl three years old, disappeared suddenly, and has not been heard of since. I followed clue upon clue, and at last, after long years, there he lies. The papers I seek are in an iron chest, which was in the cabin of Ingoldsby. Where it is now I do not know."

"Come with me," said Aurelia. "I will show you. Let a few armed men come with us, for some of the robbers may be alive."



Gabriel followed her in silence, Tim Badger and a number of the rangers following closely. She led them back to the valley, and there they saw a gaping chasm where the house stood, where, mixed with the *debris* thrown up by the explosion, were many mangled forms. As they approached the chasm Aurelia uttered a cry of surprise, and pointed to the iron chest, which lay half-covered with earth, just as it had been thrown up by the terrible explosion. The men seized it and dragged it out, and as they did so the cover fell off and a stream of golden coins, papers and the like rolled out.

"Sufferin' Moses!" cried Tim. "Keep back all of you, and let the capt'in take care of this."

"Give me the papers," said Gabriel. "Put the money back in the chest until we see to whom it belongs."

Tim put the papers into his hands, and he ran them over hastily, and in a moment uttered a cry of delight, as he found the deeds which he had lost. Among others he found a paper addressed to Aurelia, which he put into her hands.

"I have found what I seek," said Gabriel. "These papers will make all right."

Aurelia opened the paper which was given her, and read it with dilated eyes, and then put it into Gabriel's hands. It was a narrative of the life of Richard Ingoldsby, pithily written, and told who she was. Aurelia read there that her name was Sedley, a distant relative of the Sanborn family, and that heiress to the great estate which the deeds conferred upon Gabriel Sanborn. She had been stolen away from her guardian by Richard Ingoldsby, with the design of one day robbing Gabriel Sanborn of his inheritance by her means. It told one thing more. Hugh Allan was his own son, trained up to a life of blood and crime by his unnatural father; and it had been his purpose to force Aurelia to marry him, and then, in the absence of the title deeds and the proofs in his possession, she could lay claim to the Sanborn estate and win it easily. The narration is too long to be here set down, and why he had written it is not easy to say. Other papers were found establishing beyond a doubt the identity of Aurelia, and a joyful look came into her face.



"No longer nameless, no longer of the blood of that wicked man," she cried, giving Gabriel both hands. "Oh, how happy I am!"

While the rangers worked to reopen the cavern in their search for treasure, the two sat under the shade of the trees, where he had saved her from the cobra, and told him the story of her life. It had been an adventurous one, mostly spent upon the border, with no companionship save that of the outlaw band of Ingoldsby, who, while ostensibly living as trappers and guides, were ready to answer the call of their leader at a moment's notice. They had many haunts, but this was the favorite, and, in conjunction with the band of Painted Post, they had done many deeds of evil, which she had witnessed but could not avert.

Little more need be said. The rangers broke into the cavern and found those of the robbers who had not been instantly killed, dead from suffocation. A large amount of money was obtained, which was equitably divided among the rangers, Gabriel refusing to touch a penny of this ill-gained wealth. Hugh and Ingoldsby were taken out and buried under the trees, and no one mourned for them, save the gentle girl who had been their companion for many years. Incz was buried near at hand, sincerely mourned for by all.

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Upon the Pacific slope, almost in sight of Sacramento City, stands a flourishing ranch, surrounded by pleasant vineyards and fields of waving grain, where in peace and plenty, surrounded by all that can make life happy, lives Gabriel Sanborn and his wife. Need I say that the woman who is the sharer of his joys and sorrows is Aurelia, the Wild Huntress of the Foot-hills.

Tim Badger yet lives, and roams about the mountains and plains. At times he crosses to the Pacific slope, and is sure of a hearty welcome at the ranch of Gabriel Sanborn. The grass has grown green for many summers above the graves in the gulch, and even the names of the dead are almost forgotten, except by the actors in these stirring scenes.

**THE END.**



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